GERALDINE FAUCONBERG.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF CLARENTINE.

A spirit that with noble pride,
When injured or offended never tried
Its dignity by vengeance to maintain,
But by magnanimous disdain.

LYTTELTON.

VOL. I.

LONDON:

PRINTED FOR G. WILKIE AND J. ROBINSON,
57, PATERNOSTER-ROW.

1808.

To Mrs. *********.

Madam,

Whilst deliberating upon the publication of this little work, and long even before it was prepared for the press, the permission of dedicating it to you was my greatest ambition. But so well was I aware of the retired delicacy of your character—so firmly was I convinced that you would shrink, dismayed, from the idea of beholding your name *in print*, that I repressed the earnest wish I had secretly indulged, of soliciting, for my youthful Geraldine, the honour and credit of your avowed countenance. Yet, as a gratification to my own feelings, I venture, thus anonymously, to address you. Perhaps, Madam, if ever you deign to cast your eyes over these lines, my forbearance will obtain the meed to

which it most anxiously aspires—you will understand what I have only dared to insinuate; and accept, as a tribute of heartfelt gratitude and respect, the humble offering I so guardedly proffer to your indulgence.

If I have succeeded, without ascribing to my unpretending heroine those rare and splendid endowments so difficult of attainment, and so incredible of belief—to delineate the sort of character, you, dear Madam, will approve and love, I shall be amply satisfied: since it is one of the first objects I have invariably had in view. Geraldine has no brilliant qualities—she struggles through no tremendous difficulties—combats against no inordinate passions—but presents, in a probable situation, the calm virtues of domestic life; those virtues you, Madam, most highly estimate, and the only ones which are of daily utility and advantage. To a youthful female, blessed with protectors, and exposed, neither by penury nor unkindness, to distress and sorrow, the path of propriety is smooth and obvious, and by few,

perhaps, is it entirely forsaken; but it may, at pleasure, be strewn with roses, or perplexed with briars. To point out how, in the early stages of life, prosperity ought to be borne, has been my humble aim—that species of prosperity attendant upon elegant affluence, indulgent friends, and the highly-valued attribute of distinguished beauty. These—not uncommon—advantages, have, alas! spoilt numbers; but let me fondly hope you, Madam, will be of opinion I have bestowed them upon one who bears her "faculties so meekly," that, however insipid the want of romantic adventures may render her story, the candid reader will be disposed to wish well to a being who made the happiness of all around her the principal study of her existence.

I have forborne introducing any atrocious character; and you, I know, who shudder at vice and malevolence, whether real or fictitious, will approve the omission; it having ever been your aim to forbear casting a gloom over your hours of relaxation by the perusal of deeds of guilt—the

unnecessary and afflicting picture of harassed innocence, and plotting villany.

I have the honour to be,

Madam,

With the truest veneration, gratitude, and,

allow me to add, attachment,

THE AUTHOR.

GERALDINE FAUCONBERG.

LETTER I.

FREDERIC ARCHER, ESQ. TO MRS. LESMORE.

Highgrove Park,
Aug. 9, 180—.

My dear Madam,

I AM happy to find that your long-talked-of visit to this place is, at length, resolved upon. You cannot do my niece and myself a greater pleasure than to set out immediately, with a determination of continuing with us the remainder of the summer.

Your daughter, Julia, writes to her sister, Mrs. Davenant, to inform her of the safe arrival here, last night, of her children, and their attendants. They have borne the fatigue of so long a journey perfectly well,

are in excellent spirits, and lost no time in striking up an intimacy with us all. I hope, when their mother comes, she will find our air has agreed with them so well, she will be in no haste to remove them.

I shall say but little, my dear madam, upon the subject of our favourite plan. Our young people will now have a fair opportunity of judging each other. Should their inclinations correspond with our views, no alliance in the kingdom could be more gratifying to my wishes than one which would connect me so nearly with your family. But their own feelings must ultimately decide the matter; and I entreat that the silence which has hitherto been observed to Geraldine on the subject, may still be as strictly maintained as ever.—To be sincere, I have often wished that the same caution had been practised with regard to your son; for I have seldom found that the knowledge to young people (especially young men) of the matrimonial projects for them of their family, did any thing but render them secure, indifferent, and

often averse. The mischief, however—if such it proves—is already done. Let us avoid increasing it by any officiousness in showing them off to each other. Geraldine has accomplishments of mind, and graces of person, which, highly as I think of your son, are fully equal to the advantages he can boast. Let them gradually become acquainted with the merits they respectively possess; and rest assured, my dear madam, that should Lesmore even betray at first any reluctance to forward our designs—a circumstance which, from all I have observed of his independent spirit, I cannot help thinking extremely probable—I shall be in no haste to change my views. Though difficult to please, yet he has a heart which cannot always remain insensible to the attaching qualities of my happily-endowed Geraldine. Were she even divested of those personal attractions which so eminently distinguish her; were she devoid of every talent which can compel admiration, still the most cynical observer could not long inhabit the same house with her, without

feeling himself irresistibly impelled to confer upon her the meed of affectionate approbation to which her temper and disposition so justly entitle her. From infancy, her great merit has been the singular and total exemption from every species of selfishness which has invariably marked her character. There is no sacrifice she would not make to friendship or to duty: and this liberality of mind is accompanied in her, more than in any being I ever knew, with what Sterne so admirably denominates "festivity of temper!" I might justly add, in the words of the same author, "it supplies all defects—her looks are a constant resource in all difficulties or distresses."—My Geraldine is, indeed, in the fullest sense of the expression, "a complexional philosopher." She feels, but she never repines; she is benevolent, but she never parades. Simple in her manners, ingenuous and affectionate, she seems to understand, in its highest perfection, the rare and happy art of diffusing contentment and cheerfulness throughout a domestic circle. Can such

an attaching creature become thoroughly known to your son, and not be loved? Impossible. I have almost from their childhood thought their hearts were formed for contributing to the felicity of each other. Lesmore, however high-spirited, is neither rash nor arrogant; he is open to conviction: and even when going wrong, if temperately dealt with, is capable of the most generous contrition. He is a fervent admirer of whatever adorns and dignifies society; genius and talents of every description he reveres; an honourable or liberal action never failed to awaken his enthusiasm; and to all that is artful or mean-spirited his nature is nobly abhorrent. The very coldness he betrays respecting the match with my niece, manifests a carelessness of this world's paltry pelf, that can only proceed from a magnanimous and disinterested temper. Few would be the men, whether young or old, who, from the conception of some vague prejudices against her, would incur the danger of losing so wealthy an heiress. May the danger and

the prejudices be all happily dispelled, is the fervent wish of,

Dear Madam,

Your devoted friend and humble servant,

FREDERIC ARCHER.

P. S. Geraldine, apprised of my intention of writing to you, desires me to insert her thanks for the favour of Miss Lesmore's company; and her hope, that whatever may be the length of your own visit, you will not abridge that of her young friend, whose society, she says, you promised her for three months.

LETTER II.

MISS LESMORE TO HER SISTER, MRS. LUMLEY.

Highgrove Park, Aug. 18.

THEY have met, my dear Augusta, and I hasten to give you the particulars of an interview so interesting to us all.

I know not very well why, but Mr. Archer seemed persuaded the party would not be here till evening. They drove up to the door, however, yesterday, a full hour before dinner, and had been in the house above twenty minutes, before either Geraldine or I knew they were arrived.—Where do you think we were, and how do you imagine we were employed? Why, having been out on horseback the greatest part of the morning, and returning home heated and fatigued, we went up to take off our riding habits, and afterwards established ourselves, each with a book in her

hand, upon the sofa in Geraldine's dressing-room. Just as we had turned to the right page, and were beginning to read, we heard something fall down in the room over head (which has been converted into a nursery for our sister Davenant's children whilst they remain here), and the moment after, were frightened by the sound of a shrill scream. Persuaded that one of the poor little creatures had fallen, and sustained some hurt, we started from our seats, and flew up stairs. The mischief, however, proved but slight: the youngest boy, it is true, had slipped down in running across the floor; but the scream did not proceed from him, nor was it even occasioned by the alarm his accident excited: it was simply and solely a mournful effusion of regret, issuing from the melodious throat of the nursery-maid, at sight of the overthrow of a boatful of delicate pap, prepared for the baby, which, when falling himself, poor little Edward had knocked down. We rejoiced that the evil was no greater; and then, being seized captives by the three

children, always eager for a romp, were inveigled into their service for a game of blindman's-buff. I first consented to wear the *bandeau;* and after some time, having secured the person of Geraldine, assisted in blinding her. The nursery-maid joined in the sport; every body was in motion except Mrs. Nurse, who, with the infant on her lap, maintained her dignity, and sat aloof near one of the windows. The noise we all made, I believe, was no trifle!—However that may be, we were at the very height of our gambols when the door opened, and the heads of my mother and our Caroline appeared at it, peeping over each other. The former, seeing who was performing the part of *blindman*, put her finger up to her lips, to enjoin silence, and, with my sister, crept softly forward, followed by Ferdinand. They all three stood motionless near the door; and the children, longing to fly to Caroline, yet intimidated by the sign their grandmother had made, remained staring and wondering, forgetful of their game, and impatient to know what

was to follow. Meanwhile poor Geraldine, unconscious of the presence of so many witnesses, her hair dishevelled, her arms extended, and her eyes still impenetrably covered, wandered about for some time, hoping every minute to secure a successor to an employment of which she began to be heartily weary: but failing of success, and surprised at the general silence, she, at last, murmured to herself—

"I am sure I heard the door open—perhaps they have all left the room." She was then preparing to pull down the handkerchief bound across her eyes; but my mother uttering a faint "hem!" she mistook the voice for mine, and, guided by its sound, directed her steps towards the spot where stood the intruding group, and caught fast hold of Ferdinand.

"Why, Julia," cried she, feeling the sleeve of his coat, "have you slipped on your habit again?" Receiving no answer, but still maintaining her hold, she slid her hand from his shoulder up to his face, and becoming sensible, I suppose, of some un-

accountable difference between his chin and mine, she grasped him firmly by the arm, and saying, with a laugh—

"O, it is my uncle!" drew down the handkerchief which had hitherto concealed from her our treachery. Judge of her surprise and confusion, when she discovered her situation—standing close to a young stranger of whom she had fast hold, and whom she had been so unceremoniously touching—an object of attention to every body else in the room, and the obvious exciter of a general smile. Poor Geraldine! I really pitied her, though, at first, I was cruel enough to simper a little myself: but she looked so unaffectedly distressed, and shame dyed her lovely face with so deep a blush, that I hastily called out—

"My dearest Geraldine, do not be so concerned! It is only my brother, and he has been a partaker in many a game of blindman's-buff himself!"

She recovered a little on hearing who Ferdinand was, and making a slight courtesy to him, held out her hands to my mother

and Caroline, saying, in a tone of gentle reproach—

"How could you thus surprise me? Were I less glad to see you both, I should be half tempted to quarrel with you."

"No, my sweet girl, do not quarrel with us," cried my mother, fondly embracing her; "ours was no premeditated intrusion: for, till we opened the door, we knew not that you and Julia were here."

"And if we had," said Caroline, sitting down and collecting her children round her, "would it have been inexcusable in the mother of these innocent little creatures, to have felt eager to witness your good-natured participation in their pastimes? My dearest girl, you must not only forgive us, and banish all causeless embarrassment, but accept my most sincere acknowledgements for the notice you have condescended to bestow upon your happy young inmates."

Geraldine, much revived by this grateful and well-bred speech, was now emboldened to look up, and perceived, probably not

without secret satisfaction, that Ferdinand had quietly withdrawn himself. Mr. Archer and Madame de St. Hermine had by this time joined us, and we all remained in the nursery, amusing ourselves with the children, till dispersed to our several chambers by the sound of the dressing-bell.

During the short time Ferdinand had continued with us, I could not but observe with some degree of displeasure, the almost unmoved, and chilling expression of his countenance. You know, with all his advantages of face and person, what a solemn, I had nearly said, forbidding look, he can sometimes wear. Towards us, his fine dark eyes generally beam affection and indulgence; but we have often seen that he can appear more dry and reserved than any old stoic upon record. Such, or almost such, did he appear upon the present occasion. Instead of surveying the dear girl with encouraging good humour, he eyed her with mortifying indifference; stood erect and formal while she held his arm; and as soon as she discovered her mistake, made a grave

bow, and, without addressing to her a single word, stalked frigidly away! My dear sister, does he never remind you of the fastidious personage whose character entertained us so much when we read it together in some French author?

"*En parlant à une personne qu'il aime, il à l'air vif et gai; très-froid avec les étrangers; il traite durement ceux qu'il méprise; n'à rien à dire à ceux qui lui sont indifferens, et devient tout-à-fait imbécille quand on l'ennuie**."

In the evening I will conclude my account of their further proceedings with regard to each other, during the short time they have been under the same roof: I am now called away to join a party upon the water.

* "In speaking to a person he loves, his air is animated and gay; he is very cold towards strangers; treats harshly those whom he despises; has nothing to say to those who are indifferent to him, and becomes a complete idiot when annoyed by folly or presumption."——Madame Riccoboni.

WELL, my dear Augusta, I now proceed with my relation. When we were all assembled in the drawing-room, just before dinner, Geraldine and my brother were introduced to each other in due form. At table afterwards, he was placed next to her, and appointed her assistant carver, an office of which he acquitted himself dexterously and politely. But his politeness was general; no conversation passed between them beyond the common-place questions and answers usual at every meal: and the entrance of my sister's two eldest children at dessert, afforded us all a welcome relief from the dulness and taciturnity which seemed creeping upon us. Ferdinand is, as you well know, particularly fond of children, especially of Caroline's eldest boy, Charles. This lovely little creature he took upon his knee, supplied with fruit, and caressed and attended to with unwearied assiduity during the whole time we remained in the dining-parlour. We sat but a little while; and on our retiring into the drawing-room, my

mother, fatigued by her journey, threw herself upon a sofa, and, I believe, fell asleep. Madame de St. Hermine drew an arm-chair to the window, and took a book, whilst Geraldine, Caroline, and I, strolled out into the garden. The evening was calm and hot; and after sauntering about for some time, we all three seated ourselves upon a bench near the river which runs through the pleasure-grounds, and enjoyed a long and comfortable confabulation. At length, Mr. Archer and Lesmore joined us: and then we gave up our seat, and, escorted by them, resumed our walk. Presently, Mrs. Nurse, having put her little charges to bed, and left them, I suppose, to the care of her deputy, appeared in sight, taking her evening stroll.

"That nurse of yours, Caroline," observed Lesmore, "is a very handsome woman."

"I think," said I, addressing him in a low voice, "there is a sort of sympathy between you."

"Ridiculous! What can you mean?"

"Why, she condemns and despises

childish recreations as much as you do. She looked on while Geraldine and I played at blindman's-buff in the nursery, with all the discouraging austerity I afterwards observed in your stately countenance."

"Pooh! I did not show any austerity or stateliness!"

"Indeed you did."

"Why, my dear Julia, what could you expect me to say or do? There is certainly nothing censurable in playing at blindman's-buff, neither is there any thing very meritorious in it. I could not be in ecstasy at such a sight! It is a very common one: it calls forth no graces of person, or ingenuity of mind. What, then, let me repeat, could you reasonably expect me to say upon so insignificant an occasion?"

"I pretend not to prescribe to you what you might have said: but allow me just to observe, that your manner was more serious, and implied more contempt, than, all things considered, I think you were warranted in showing. You are prejudiced against Miss Fauconberg. Had you sur-

prised any other young woman in a similar predicament, you would have manifested more gallantry and good nature."

To this he made no direct answer; and after sauntering on some minutes in silence, I attempted to renew the conversation.

"Do you think Miss Fauconberg handsome?"

"Yes; the most inveterate *prejudice* could not deny her that praise."

Here finally ended our little dialogue. I remained somewhat disturbed and discomfited, and secretly determined scrupulously to forbear ever making Geraldine the subject of any future discourse with my brother.

After tea, our two gentlemen amused themselves with turning over some new pamphlets Mr. Archer has lately received from town. Geraldine, who usually draws in the evening, chose, however, on the present occasion, to become a member of the work-table. We all displayed great notability, both of fingers and tongue, for a considerable time: but at last, Caroline starting up, and declaring she had half

blinded herself over her tambour-frame, went to the piano-forte, and began playing the symphony of a duet, calling upon Geraldine to sing it with her. The perverse little soul, quietly, but steadily declined it. My mother and Caroline both urged her in vain; and, therefore, the good people were forced to be content with me as her feeble substitute. I was vexed that Geraldine would not let my brother hear her full-toned, flexible, and touching voice; I am sure he would have admired it, for hers is precisely the style of singing he always professes to delight in: but Madame de St. Hermine, though she did not speak, evidently approved her pupil's refusal; and, indeed, has systematically appeared, from the moment Lesmore entered the house, to avoid drawing Geraldine into conversation or notice. She may have good reasons for such a plan of conduct: but I own it is painful to me to see a person I so affectionately love, encouraged in holding back from observation an understanding the most cul-

tivated, and talents so well calculated to excite applause. She sits like a cipher; a pretty one, we must allow, but perfectly insignificant: if she is spoken to, she answers in so low a voice, it is difficult to understand her: she avoids every chance of encountering Ferdinand's eye, and moves about the room, when he is present, as if she were fearful of being chidden for doing something wrong! All this grieves me: it must lead him to conclude she is weak, that her manners are unformed, and that her timidity, the result of conscious inferiority, is rather to be rejoiced at than lamented. That this, or any thing like this, should be thought of Geraldine Fauconberg, wounds me to the soul.

This morning the gentlemen were out on horseback, from breakfast almost to dinner-time. Soon after they returned, our good-humoured brother-in-law, Davenant, arrived, and will stay here with Caroline, and their two eldest children, a week longer. My mother leaves us to-morrow, for a few

days, to pay a visit to her old friend, Lady Rachel Sinclair: but she is so good as to dispense with my accompanying her.

In my next (if I can find time) I will send you the little history of Madame de St. Hermine, which I promised to obtain from Mr. Archer. He related it to me in greater detail than I could have expected, during a ramble I persuaded him to take with me a day or two ago: and I should have made it the principal subject of this very letter, had not the singular, or, more properly speaking, untoward circumstances attending the first interview of Geraldine and Lesmore, driven every thing else out of my thoughts.

Adieu, my dearest Augusta, believe me ever, most affectionately yours,

JULIA LESMORE.

LETTER III.

FERDINAND LESMORE, ESQ. TO THE REV. ARCHIBALD NEWENDEN.

My dear Sir, Highgrove Park, Aug. 20.

I AM afraid that the consciousness of doing right does not always mitigate the uneasy sensations that attend the performance of what is disagreeable. It was right, you told me, that I should comply with my mother's pressing solicitations, and consent to visit the lady whom for so many years she has wished me to consider as my destined partner. The situation of my own heart considered, I much doubted whether indeed this *was* a proper measure: I made known to you my scruples, and described to you my reluctance: you still persevered in advising the step; and what weighed with me more even than your utmost eloquence, my honoured friend, was the con-

solatory sentence with which you concluded your exhortation:

"You do Miss Fauconberg no injury, "my dear Lesmore, if, after a candid and "impartial investigation of her character, "you resign all pretension to her hand. "She knows not that you have been encouraged to aspire to it; and, should you "finally renounce it, need never receive "the mortifying information."

How do these words, the longer I reflect upon them, and the longer I am acquainted with Miss Fauconberg, comfort and reassure me! My dear friend, she never can become my wife. Whether impelled by the perverseness of human nature to consider her with distaste, precisely because I have been urged to regard her with partiality, I will not determine: but certain it is, she makes upon me no impressions but such as are unpleasant, and such as I would gladly shake off, by declining the mercenary alliance for ever. From the moment I thought myself of an age to consider what species of wife I should prefer, I conceived

an aversion to the idea of marrying a mere romping, pretty girl; one whose manners and disposition were unformed; whose tastes were childish, and whose turn of mind, as yet dormant or unfixed, might, when free scope was given to its display, prove itself capricious, arrogant, or unfeeling. I may be singular in my notions: but I protest to you, dear sir, I had rather unite myself to a woman some years my senior, whose opinions and habits appeared consistent, than contract an alliance with any raw girl, unacquainted with the world, and, as yet, a stranger even to her own propensities. These very young Misses, who have been brought up like eastern slaves, destined for a Harem, to attend only, in their impenetrable seclusion, to the cultivation of their exterior accomplishments, and the preservation of their beauty, have no real character, but take the bent of those with whom they first chance to associate on emerging from retirement. During a short period, perhaps, the pretty puppet would allow her husband to guide her in the choice of her

pursuits and the selection of her companions: but, in a very little while, she would grow sick of such submission; and, to say the truth, were I the happy husband, I should not care how soon she struggled to release herself from thraldom. I loathe the thought of having a full-grown baby to direct and watch: if I found that her capacity was slender, I should despise her; if she was obstinate, I should hate her; and if she was too tame and complying, perhaps I might be brute enough to become her tyrant. By a marriage with Miss Fauconberg, I incur all these risks. Though, from the age of nine years, she has spent three or four months in London every spring, yet she is as new to the world as if she had been born yesterday. She was too young to go into company, and therefore derived no other advantages from her abode in town than such as an easy access to masters of every description could confer. Since her return into the country this year, she has been at two or three provincial balls, at a race, and at a few dinners in the neigh-

bourhood. How well these schools of manners have fitted her to appear upon the great theatre of life, to judge the characters of others, and become acquainted with her own, I leave you to decide. This much is incontrovertible, that with an extraordinary degree of beauty, and a countenance that might become highly interesting were it illumined by an intelligent soul, she appears to me, at present, a complete prototype of insipidity. I have been told much of her various talents, but have yet had no specimen of any. I feel not impatient, however, to be gratified on this head. Few girls of eighteen, even with such opportunities as Miss Fauconberg has had, ever acquit themselves so perfectly in any thing they undertake, as to convey unmixed pleasure to the mind: and what task can be more annoying than that of appearing to attend with admiration to what can only give qualified delight, and calls for *candid allowances?*

Address to me one of your admonitory epistles, for such I expect your next will

be, at this place. I am under an engagement to remain here a month: when I depart, your vicarage, my dear father-confessor, will be the first spot to which I shall hasten, if indeed you can consent to admit so untractable, but grateful, a pupil, friend, and devoted servant, as your

FERDINAND LESMORE.

LETTER IV.

MISS LESMORE TO MRS. LUMLEY.

Highgrove Park,
Aug. 20.

My dear Augusta,

I HAVE been internally moralizing the whole morning upon the folly of making needless promises; and to give you a specimen of my sententious powers, will now tell you, that I am decidedly of opinion, no man is wiser than he who determines never to fetter the freedom of his will, by engaging to perform to-morrow what he is repugnant to accomplish to-day! I taught you, when last I wrote, to expect such particulars concerning Madame de St. Hermine as I had been enabled to gather; and now, haunted by the remembrance of my own rash officiousness, I can, though unusually disinclined to write, turn with comfort to no other occupation. I might, indeed, yet longer put off the undertaking; but I am

too intimately acquainted, by reiterated experience, with the never-failing effects of procrastination, to allow myself so dangerous an indulgence.

Madame de St. Hermine certainly deserves a more willing biographer; and perhaps, as I advance in her story, the indolent sensations which withheld me from beginning it with alacrity, will wear away, and my love and admiration for her incite me to proceed with spirit and pleasure.

You already are informed that she has now resided with Geraldine Fauconberg, and had the superintendence of her education, nearly ten years. She was originally of one of the highest families in France, and was brought up in affluence and splendour, yet with an attention to the cultivation of her mind, even superior to that bestowed on the improvement of her talents. She was (an unusual circumstance at that time in France) educated at home, under the vigilant inspection of an elegant and sensible mother, and the care of a highly-principled and accomplished English go-

verness. Her marriage, at an early period of her life, to Monsieur de St. Hermine, completed what the well-directed efforts of her first guides had begun. He was a man who, by a frequent residence in foreign courts, as minister, had acquired a thorough knowledge of the world, to which the studious disposition of his mind had induced him to add a very unusual degree of learning, both ancient and modern. His character was firm, honourable, and liberal; and his attachment to his wife such as to constitute the felicity of both their lives. She had not the same information he possessed: but in matters of taste they rarely differed; in principles, never.

The union of this admirable pair, the most exemplary that was, perhaps, ever witnessed at the dissipated court of a dissipated kingdom, was further blessed by the birth of two sons, neither of whom they had the consolation of seeing grown up, before the Revolution broke out. Whilst both were yet mere boys, they emigrated, with their father, into Germany, where he had once

resided as ambassador. Their mother deemed it of advantage to their interest, at least for a time, to remain at Paris. Her principal object for so doing, that of saving something from the wreck of their property, she effected with a good fortune exceeding her hopes; and even found means to convey the greatest part of what she had thus, at the hazard of her life, preserved, to the dear fugitives, it was now her sole ambition to follow. But the difficulties attending an emigration into Germany, were, by this time, become so formidable, that she was compelled to steer her course towards England; and though reduced, by the sums she had remitted to Vienna, to a very scanty pittance for herself, she was brought, at last, to consider as a very extraordinary blessing, the being enabled to reach this country in safety.

London was no new scene to her. In her more prosperous days, she had already, accompanied by her husband, made the journey as a mere matter of curiosity and amusement, and had been caressed and

fêted by many of the first families in the country. To a few of these, with whom she had then been on the most intimate footing, she now made herself known. Every mark of respect, and every expression of interest and kindness, was lavished upon her. But these, though consolatory and highly gratifying, were not all that her circumstances required, since what she had brought over was scarcely sufficient, with the strictest economy, to promise her an adequate maintenance for a few months. With the courage, good sense, and resignation that so peculiarly distinguish her, she formed the resolution of giving up, for the moment, her independence, and of undertaking, in some well-born and well-bred family, the post she still so honourably holds in that of Mr. Archer. To this gentleman she was introduced and most zealously recommended, soon after it was known he had determined to give his orphan ward a private education. The appearance of the elegant candidate filled him with surprise and admiration, and her conversation and

manners confirmed the favourable impression that appearance was so well calculated to excite. She was then, though turned of thirty, in the full meridian of her beauty, which, to judge by its present remains, must, at that period, have been exquisite. She was animated, high-bred, and dignified; "and in short, my dear Julia," added Mr. Archer, when giving me these details, "she was exactly the sort of woman whom, had I been twenty years younger, I would not have invited into my house!" Relying, however, upon the security these twenty years were to afford him, he speedily concluded his arrangements with her, brought her down to Highgrove Park, and here, except during the annual excursion they make to town, she has resided, revered and beloved, ever since.

What remains to be told concerning her husband is short, but melancholy. All his efforts to rejoin Madame de St. Hermine proved fruitless. He religiously forbore engaging with foreigners in the war that was waged against his country; but obtained

some trifling civil employment at Vienna, and there remained till, after a lingering illness, a period was put to his life and his misfortunes. The eldest son, when left to his own guidance, was induced to enter the Austrian service, and perished in his first engagement. His brother, with incredible danger and trouble, at length succeeded in reaching this country. My brother knows him well. He is now in London; gay and sanguine, and supporting his *décadence* with fortitude and spirit.

Thus, my dear Augusta, have I fulfilled my promise, and given you a summary account of the charming foreigner you have so often heard me mention, though you have so rarely had any opportunity of conversing with her. Till within these few days, my mother herself knew not the particulars of her history, notwithstanding the continual intercourse we have long been accustomed to have with her. But what seems more extraordinary, though in a great measure the effect of accident, is, that Ferdinand never till now was five minutes

in company with Geraldine since she was ten years old. It is true, she neither paid nor received visits, and did not dine at her uncle's table in London when he had any guests. But Lesmore so frequently called upon Mr. Archer in the morning, he was in such favour with Madame de St. Hermine, and so intimate at the house, that it is really marvellous he should never have had a glimpse of his destined bride. I sometimes fear, from his present behaviour, that he suspects her being held back so studiously was a concerted family measure, the object of which was, to keep alive his curiosity and suspense concerning her, till she was of an age to be presented to him, so resplendent in beauty, and so exalted in accomplishments, that it would be utterly impossible any penetrable human heart could resist the influence of her attractions.

Adieu, however, for the present, my dear sister: I am not only tired of writing, but I have put myself out of humour by recurring to Lesmore's vexatious conduct. How

you would wonder at, and condemn him, could you transport yourself hither for a few hours!

Yours, ever affectionately,

JULIA LESMORE.

LETTER V.

FERDINAND LESMORE, ESQ. TO THE REV. ARCHIBALD NEWENDEN.

My dear Sir, Highgrove Park.

YOUR letter reached me this morning, and I am already seated at my writing table to relieve the anxiety it so kindly expresses. The sentence you allude to in my last is not of such terrific import as you conceive. Though I hinted at the *situation of my heart*, I am not in love, I give you my honour. I feel a preference for, a sort of attraction, when in her society, towards a very lovely woman: but I am in full possession of my reason; I can even descry her faults; I spend whole days without recollecting she is in existence; and when I quitted her, I might, with as great truth as at any period of my life, have boasted in

the words of Petrarca before he beheld his beauteous Laura,

> Lagrima ancor non mi bagnava il petto,
> Ne rompea il sonno: e quel che'n me non era,
> Mi pareva un miracolo in altrui *.

This ideal enemy of my repose is Mrs. Neville, widow of the Hon. George Neville, who was killed two years ago by a fall from his horse in hunting. He was a noted sportsman—a booby—and, when intoxicated (which was not seldom the case), a brute. She was married very young, and is now only in the twenty-fourth year of her age. I became acquainted with her last autumn, at Brighton, and afterwards spent a fortnight in the same house with her at her brother-in-law's, Lord M——'s. Her figure is strikingly elegant; her manners are easy, fashionable, and gay; and her countenance the most variable and ani-

* No tear then bathed my bosom, nor sorrow broke my rest—and what in myself I felt not, appeared to me miraculous in others.

mated I have ever beheld. She has two sparkling black eyes, with which it is her boast that, when she pleases, she "can do any thing." Her faculties are quick, but her judgement is defective; she has a retentive memory, and a considerable degree of cultivation, but no steadiness in her pursuits, or depth in her attainments. Her mind is generous even to a fault; she reveres intellectual abilities, and professes a contempt for upstarts, or mere monied people, but too apparent, whenever an occasion presents itself for displaying it. The careless disdain which she avows of the opinion and censures of the world, is so daring; her conduct testifies so determined a disposition to please herself, indifferent to the *qu'en dira-t'-on?* that her principles are questioned by the scrupulous, and her acquaintance is avoided by the timid. Yet I firmly believe her to be of irreproachable purity; her heart appears compassionate and benevolent; her temper, though warm, is placable and easy, and the eccentricities of her character, though dangerous, have

hitherto been harmless, and such only as to heighten the charms of her conversation.

Now, my dear sir, after giving you such a description of this lady, I leave you fairly to estimate the good and the bad, and then to decide whether I am in imminent peril from her attractions. Love and habit, were I to be often thrown in her way, might perhaps soften down the harshness of my censure, and throw a veil over her imperfections; but at present, unblinded by passion, they stare me fully in the face, and frighten me from the most distant idea of indulging for her a serious attachment. I own that she interests, amuses, and has, now and then, absolutely enchanted me; but whether that open defiance of *the herd*, to use one of her own expressions, would always accommodate the unfortunate nicety of my feelings, you, who know me, perhaps, better than I know myself, can best determine. I consider you as entitled to my utmost sincerity, and have made no scruple of speaking upon this subject with entire unreserve. What I have written will,

I doubt not, amply reassure you. Let me add, that at this moment I am ignorant in what part of England Mrs. Neville is residing.

We go on here very monotonously. Davenant, my sister Caroline's husband, is with us, but adds little to our party. I remember how angry you once were at my calling him, in Dryden's words, "the fool of nature." I have long since revoked that offensive appellation in its full force; but still obstinately insist, that he is shallow and weak. Yet there is some good about him; for though not wise, he is never captious; though nineteen out of twenty of his notions are wrong, he is not stubborn: and he sometimes blunders upon an original and entertaining remark. He is, moreover, a most affectionate father, and a perfectly accommodating husband! He and Caroline leave us next week, and I find some amusement during their stay, in sketching the likeness of their eldest boy, Charles. This little creature, were he mine, would compensate to me, I think, for almost every

other privation. I often wonder at the strength of my own attachment to him; yet, when I consider the frank affection he always manifests for me—the manly, fearless, and intelligent nature he displays, I cease to accuse myself of folly, and only wish I was the father of such a child.

Farewel, my kind Monitor! believe me, with equal respect and gratitude,

Yours ever,

FERDINAND LESMORE.

LETTER VI.

MISS LESMORE TO MRS. LUMLEY.

Highgrove Park,
Aug. 27.

GERALDINE has, at length, my dear Augusta, recovered from the species of panic that seized her on my brother's first arrival, and is, as I tell her, "Herself again!" We had a very curious conversation two days ago, which, as well as I can remember, I will repeat to you.

Caroline, she, and I, had been taking a long walk before dinner, escorted by Mr. Davenant. During this ramble, which was confined to retired fields and lanes, she had been in more playful spirits than I almost ever saw her; had laughed, sung, and talked with the utmost animation, and practised against our good humoured brother-in-law, a thousand tricks. I was not backward in seconding her; and though

our matronly companion took no active part in our *espiegleries*, she enjoyed them heartily, and was even the first, slily to instigate us to fresh mischief. As we drew near the house, on our return home, Mad. de St. Hermine, leaning upon my brother's arm, appeared in sight, seemingly in grave conversation. An almost instantaneous revolution operated itself in Geraldine on beholding them. She drew her hat forwarder, composed her pretty mouth, placed herself between Caroline and me, and scarcely spoke another word whilst we were out. Madame de St. Hermine stopped when she came up to us; hoped we had had a pleasant walk, and inquired where we had been. Davenant, in a moment, poured forth a torrent of ludicrous complaints against us, and declared he had been so baited and ill-used the whole morning, especially by Miss Fauconberg, that he would never trust himself out with us again. These accusations accorded so very oddly with the sedate look Geraldine had now assumed, that I saw Ferdinand was struck by the incon-

gruity; and a sort of supercilious expression played about his mouth, for which I could willing have beaten him, and which, I am certain, escaped not the observation of Geraldine. Madame de St. Hermine affected great compassion for the oppressed plaintiff, and then walked on with her impertinent attendant. We proceeded to the house, and parting with Caroline and her husband at the foot of the stairs, Geraldine and I went together into the dressing-room.

There, silently taking off her walking things, and then sitting down near the window, with a look that showed her internally much vexed, she fixed her eyes upon some distant object in the park, and appeared to forget that any one was near her. I was determined not to speak first; I wished so much to know exactly what was passing in her mind, that I hoped, if no turn was given to her thoughts by chance interrogations, the first word she uttered would betray the secret subject of her meditations.

At last, endeavouring to speak with cheerfulness, "My dear Julia," said she, "I have behaved very like a fool this morning!"

I laughed, and answered, "You know best your own title to such a charge; but the epithet is a little strong, and some of its odium, I fear, reflects upon me, who have behaved quite as ill."

"O you entirely mistake me. I am not quarrelling with myself for having teased your brother-in-law; he forgives it, I am very certain, and my conscience perfectly acquits me of all intention seriously to annoy him. But what I blame and hate myself for, is the little prim, demure look, I put on, when Mr. Lesmore came in sight. I know not what possesses me, but I feel afraid of him; I am always acting a part in his presence, and, conscious of appearing to disadvantage, I disgrace myself by a sort of school-girl awkwardness, an imbecile shamefacedness, that would only be pardonable in a damsel suddenly transplanted from the dairy to the drawing-room."

" I perfectly understand all you mean, my dear Geraldine," said I; " and can easily account for the unpleasant feelings you mention. Ferdinand appears to you a stately censor; and I will not answer for it that he is not really become so; it used to be otherwise: but let that pass. Pray, of what consequence is it to you whether he regards you with approbation or not? Why do you take the trouble of prescribing to yourself any system of conduct on his account? I cannot bear to see you repressing your spirits, banishing every smile, and sitting like a snubbed baby in his company. Forget, or try to become careless, whether he is in the room, or a hundred miles off; and exert your utmost endeavours to be exactly what you were before he came to the house."

" Thank you, dear Julia, for this encouraging advice; I will compel myself scrupulously to follow it. But let me explain to you, as well as I am able, the origin of my strange fears. I have been spoiled by the indulgent partiality of my

uncle and Madame de St. Hermine; they scarcely ever looked unkindly at me in their lives. Those I have been most accustomed to associate with, such, for instance, as your mother, your sister, and yourself, have all regarded and treated me with the same lenity. Now, your brother, who ought, perhaps, to be the most courteous among them—"

"He ought to have his ungracious visage slapped!" interrupted I, angrily.

"Not on my account," resumed she, with a smile; "if *slapping* would make his general manners more conciliating, I should not be very sorry to hear he had undergone the operation, though I should certainly be extremely unwilling he should suffer it in my cause: but let me conclude what I had to say. Your brother is the first person who ever cast upon me a forbidding glance. Unlike the rest of his kind family, he seems completely to disdain me; and, to say the truth, had he been of any other race, I should have endeavoured, from the moment I perceived it, equally to disdain him; but

the relation of so many dear friends, I could not immediately consider with such total indifference; and I have been accustomed to hear him so highly spoken of, that I was ambitious, let me own it, to obtain his good opinion. But all that is now over; we have both received such unfavourable impressions, that I know not whether Time even, all powerful as he is, will ever be able to efface them. However that may be, rest assured, my dear Julia, that from this instant it shall be my incessant study to rise superior to the weak embarrassment he caused me!"

She pronounced this last sentence with an air of calm but wounded dignity, that infinitely struck me. I highly applauded the determination she had adopted, and we mutually agreed to banish Ferdinand entirely from our conversation, and as much as possible from our thoughts.

During dinner, at which were present, in addition to our own party, a neighbouring family of the name of Everley, remarkably

sensible, pleasing people, Geraldine appeared restored to all her accustomed ease and presence of mind. Mr. Everley, who occupied the seat next to her at the head of the table, which Ferdinand in general so ungraciously fills, held her in almost constant conversation. She was by no means negligent, however, of the rest of the company, but did the honours of her place with grace and politeness; and never, I thought, appeared to greater advantage. I know not whether Lesmore observed the striking change in her demeanour. He sat next to Mrs. Everley, and was engaged in discourse with her almost all dinner-time: but that Madame de St. Hermine, Mr. Archer, and Caroline perceived it, was very evident, as was likewise the pride and pleasure which the revolution gave them.

Before the gentlemen left the dining-parlour to rejoin us at tea, my mother, whom we had been expecting the whole day, drove up to the door. The sound of the carriage drew every body out into the hall,

where she had some reason to be surprised at finding so large a party assembled to receive her. But in the country, the rattle of wheels, you know, is an event. Compliments, inquiries, and an introduction to the two visitors, Mr. and Mrs. Everley, having passed, tea and coffee were ordered, and we dispersed ourselves over the drawing-room in detached parties. I belonged to one, consisting of Geraldine, Mr. Everley, and Caroline; but yet I was placed in such a direction, that when I chose to listen, I could distinctly hear what was talked of in the next group, composed of my mother, Madame de St. Hermine, and Ferdinand. One of the first speeches that caught my attention was the following, made by my mother:

"I have seen, at Lady Rachel Sinclair's, an acquaintance of yours, Ferdinand, who did you the honour to make many polite inquiries after you."

"A lady, I presume; pray, who was she?"

"Mrs. Neville. She is niece to Lady Rachel, and now on a visit to her."

"Mrs. Neville!" repeated my brother, in a tone of surprise; "and how long has she been in this part of the world?"

"I cannot exactly tell you: but when she leaves her aunt, which I believe will be soon, she is coming very near Mr. Archer's, to a house called Westhill, which she has lately purchased, and is now fitting up."

You will wonder, my dear Augusta, why I should repeat to you this apparently insignificant dialogue: but the fact is, I know something of Mrs. Neville myself, and felt truly provoked when I heard she was coming into this neighbourhood. Last year, whilst I was at Brighton, with the Davenants and Ferdinand, we used to see her every day. She was the belle of the place; a very fashionable, gay, young widow: and Lesmore obtaining an introduction to her, soon became one of her most assiduous courtiers. They danced together, walked together, were of the same parties upon the

water, and, in short, flirted most abominably! I dread the idea of their meeting again, and heartily hope she will not take possession of her new house till my brother is gone.

Cards having been proposed, and declined by every body, except my mother, Mr. Archer, Davenant, and Madame de St. Hermine, some of the rest of the party applied to Geraldine for a little music. She still found some plausible pretence to decline singing, but consented to play without hesitation, and acquitted herself with even more than her usual excellence. This was the first time she had ever been induced to sit down to the instrument when Ferdinand was in the room: but in pursuance of her good resolutions of the morning, I saw she was determined no longer to let him have any influence over her conduct. His surprise on hearing her perform in so superior a manner, was very perceptible, and, to me, very gratifying. She remained unconscious of it, however; for during the whole evening her eyes, I

believe, never rested upon him a moment.

When they would allow her to rise from the piano-forte, Mr. Everley asked her whether she had made any addition, when last in town, to her collection of coins and medals?

"Very few," answered she; "but my uncle bought me an exceeding good set of sulphurs."

Mr. Everley begged to see them; and she left the room to fetch the boxes in which they were contained. As they were more, however, than she could conveniently carry, I hastened after her to assist in bringing them down.

"You played delightfully, my dear Geraldine," said I, when I joined her, "and your looks and manners are just what they used to be."

"Thank you, Julia, for supporting me against this formidable brother of yours. I rejoice to find in myself courage to feel and appear at ease in his society."

"He has been so disagreeable since he

came here," resumed I, "that I really do not love him at this moment half so well as I used to do."

"O Julia! can any thing make one cease to love a brother?"

I kissed her for this affectionate sentiment, and soon after we returned with our burthens into the drawing-room.

You will blame me, Augusta, for censuring Lesmore so unsparingly to our friend. I believe, however, though I did it in sincerity of indignation, it would be no bad plan to do it from policy. Magnifying the faults of any one who has offended a generous nature, only calls forth extenuations, and sets the fancy at work to find out ingenious apologies for the delinquent. You perceive that Geraldine will not let me profess any diminution of regard for my brother: but would, were I to be too severe, rise up in his defence.

The sulphurs, a little cabinet of coins, and some prints in port-folios, filled up our time during the remainder of the evening. Mr. and Mrs. Everley appear to have a taste

for all these sort of things, and departed apparently much pleased with their visit.

I shall have more to say to you of this agreeable couple in a future letter; at present, I will confine myself to the relation of a little incident, which, as it was communicated to us yesterday morning by Geraldine, must, I think, have made a favourable impression upon our philosophical brother—he who so much despises exaggerated and puerile female terrors.

Whilst we were all, except Ferdinand, who was taking an early ride, assembled round the breakfast table, Geraldine asked us whether we chose to hear a frightful story? "One," she added, "that relates to something very like a nocturnal vision which appeared to me last night."

"To you!" we all exclaimed. "Oh, pray tell us the whole history."

"Why, then," resumed she, solemnly, "it was about two o'clock this morning when I was suddenly awakened by hearing a slight noise in my room. The night being hot, I had drawn up both the window

curtains, and left part of the window shutters open, so that the moon, who is always an active agent upon these sort of occasions, poured a long line of radiance into the apartment. Just in this line stood a light, slim figure, reflecting from its white habiliments the bright beams that played upon it! I started from my pillow"——

Here she was interrupted by the entrance (an unwelcome one to us all at that moment) of Ferdinand, apologizing for not having returned sooner, and bringing us back to all the common forms of common life. As soon as he was seated, helped to tea, and cream, and sugar, and rolls, we gave him a terrific account of the slim ghost, and besought Geraldine to conclude its adventures. A little of her but-lately-banished timidity assailed her, and she wished, for that time, to wave the subject; but every body was so anxious to hear the sequel of the tale, that making a noble effort to conquer her reluctance, yet blushing, and at first looking down, she thus went on:

"With breathless alarm, I gazed at the inexplicable apparition, but had not courage to speak. It presently began to move, and, muttering to itself in indistinct accents, went to my dressing-table, and threw away the faded flowers I had worn; then flitted to the chest of drawers, and drew one or two of them open: but all this time appeared to have no design to molest me, or even to approach the same end of the room. At last, as it again stood still in the lightest part of the chamber, I thought I knew its face; and had a mountain been removed from my chest, the relief could not have been greater to my oppressed respiration!"

"Who was it?" we eagerly demanded.

"Jane, my new maid, who was walking in her sleep, and dreaming, I suppose, poor girl, of her mistress's caps and gowns, which she fancied herself, perhaps, arranging in the nicest order."

"What did you do when you made this discovery?"

"Why, bless her from the bottom of my heart, for being neither a spectre nor a thief!—and, moreover, rise up, throw on a dressing-gown, take her gently by the hand, and conduct her to her own room."

"Did she wake then?"

"No; I led her to the bed-side, and contrived to make her sit down; but how to induce her to get into the bed I knew not, without startling her out of her sleep, and causing her, when she saw me, and became conscious of the strange vagaries she had played, as much consternation as I had suffered myself. I therefore wrapt her up as well as I could, left the room, and repaired to that of one of the other maids who slept near her, and whom I recommended to go quietly to her. And thus ends my marvellous adventure."

"It is an adventure, my darling girl," said Mr. Archer, "which, in all its circumstances, reflects upon you great credit. But there," added he, looking at Madame de St. Hermine, "there we must make our

acknowledgements. To the incomparable counsels and example of that admirable friend, you owe the calm and considerate presence of mind which enabled you, on this occasion, to act so properly."

"Dear uncle," said Geraldine, rising and looking abashed, "how much too seriously do you exalt the merit of this little transaction!"

All who were present, however, even Ferdinand, joined with her uncle in applauding her; but, ashamed of having drawn upon herself such encomiums, she took me by the hand, and we left the room together.

I protested to her, when we were alone, that I could not have acted so coolly in such circumstances; adding,

"The moment the phantom appeared, I should have begun a shriek, which would have lasted till somebody came to my assistance; and, I do assure you, now I know there is one of the *Somnambules* in the house, I shall take especial care to lock myself up every night."

" You need not, my dear Julia," said she, laughing, " for I intend to order Jane's door to be fastened as soon as she goes to bed; and I even purpose to have bars put to her windows: for I have heard that these poor creatures sometimes meet with frightful accidents, by trying, if they find themselves locked up, to get out through the windows!"

We then went to the dressing-room, where we usually sit every morning, and where Geraldine, who is painting a miniature of little Charles, sent for him to give her a *seance*. It is my province, by reading, or telling him amusing stories, to keep him quiet during the half hour he is detained; and when his imprisonment is over, we load him with so many little rewards for having been good, that he is by no means unwilling to come to us. The picture is not yet much advanced, but promises to be extremely like. Caroline, for whom it is intended, has offered to stay some days longer than she originally intended, to give the fair

paintress time to finish it. The proposal has been gratefully accepted. Adieu, my dearest Augusta.

Yours ever affectionately,

JULIA LESMORE.

LETTER VII.

MISS LESSMORE TO THE SAME.

Highgrove Park,
Aug. 29.

YOUR kind letter, my dear Augusta, has just been delivered to me. Indeed you are much too grateful for those I have written since Ferdinand's arrival. Independent of the conviction I feel of the interest you must take in all that is now passing at Highmore Park, I derive great amusement and pleasure from communicating to you my thoughts and observations upon the conduct, at this critical juncture, of two persons we all so affectionately love. Your approbation of my voluntary labours will encourage me not to relax in industry.

Yesterday morning, on our return from one of our accustomed rambles, Caroline, Geraldine, and I went into the library, where Madame de St. Hermine was sitting

with my mother and the three gentlemen. Presently, little Charles ran past the window, and Ferdinand, starting from his chair, threw up the sash, and called the child to him.

"Charles," said he, "you are a young truant! I have wanted you the whole morning."

"Have you, uncle," said the boy, rather plaintively, "and must I come to you now?"

"Not if you are *very* unwilling; but you know I should not keep you long."

"O, I don't mind how long you keep me, uncle, if I may but run about, and talk, and look as I like! But I am so tired of those nasty pictures! And I have been very good about them once this morning already."

"Why, my dear fellow, this is the first time I have seen you to-day!"

"O, but I have been *picturing* for all that! Hav'n't I, Miss Fauconberg?"

"Yes, my dear Charles, and you were a very patient little boy: but I am sorry to

have tired you so much that you will not now go to your uncle."

"Ferdinand," said I, "if you will show us the portrait you have been so snugly taking of this child, I will, in return, lend you my assistance during the sittings, and exert myself to amuse him, as I have hitherto done, whilst he has been with Geraldine."

"A very generous proposal, and I accept its conditions: but could you not prevail upon Miss Fauconberg to let us have a sight of the picture she has begun?"

"By all means," cried Mr. Archer, "let us look at the two performances together."

Geraldine, on account of hers being in so unfinished a state, made some remonstrances, but they were overruled by her uncle's earnestness, and, with her accustomed good-humour, she ran up stairs to fetch it. Ferdinand likewise went in search of his, and when they both returned, it was entertaining to observe the eagerness with which each sought to examine the other's performance. In their different styles, we found it impossible to decide which was the

best done, the most beautiful, or the strongest likeness. Lesmore's is only a drawing in water-colours, for he has no materials here for painting in oils; but it is exquisitely graceful, more highly finished than his drawings usually are, and designed with an ease and freedom truly masterly. The miniature of Geraldine, like herself, is inimitably delicate; the colouring is glowing, and yet natural: and the outline, I believe, might bear the strictest examination. Ferdinand appeared delighted with it, and Geraldine was no less struck with his drawing. I was enchanted that accident had thus made each acquainted with a talent in the other, of which they are mutually so well qualified to judge.

We dined an hour earlier than usual, my mother and Madame de St. Hermine wishing to take an evening drive to N——, our nearest town, on some shopping business. Caroline chose to accompany them, but Geraldine and I declined being of the party; and as soon as they were gone, ordering a table and garden-chairs to be placed for us

in the shade, on the banks of the river, we went and took possession of our rural seats, with our books and work. The weather was delicious; our minds were calm and happy; every thing around us looked serenely beautiful; and never in my life, I think, did I more completely and gratefully enjoy the consciousness of existence.

Fearless of dew or of cold, we watched, in almost total silence, the gradual advance of the shades of evening, the rise of the moon, and the general diffusion of that sort of mistiness which spreads itself through the air at the close of a glowing summer-day. At length Geraldine, who had for some time been employed in making memorandums in her tablets, broke silence, and, in a voice soft and soothing as the scene we were contemplating, recited the following

SONNET:

Thy sober light, O Evening! let me hail,
Catch thy soft sadness, and thy calm repose;
At thy approach let mourners cease to wail,
And on thy bosom hush their throbbing woes.

Thy balmy power has oft been felt by those
Who, thro' the day, were troubled or oppress'd:
From grief and toil the haggard bondman owes
To thee his dear-bought, temporary rest.

The happy bless the advances of the morn,
Expecting pleasures they but seldom find;
But thou, mild Evening! art to the forlorn
A precious harbinger of peace of mind:
Who seeks not joys to thee will be a friend,
And with thy stillness his own sorrows blend.

Scarcely had she concluded the last line of this little pensive effusion, when we heard, at no great distance, the voices of the gentlemen, and presently were joined by them. They drew a bench near us and sat down, Mr. Archer saying, as he took his place,

"This is an hour and a scene to awaken poetical ideas; have they produced no such effect upon either of you, my fair friends?"

Geraldine pressed my hand to engage me not to betray her, and Mr. Archer, looking up, presently added,

"Who amongst our English poets has

succeeded best in describing the beauties of a clear, mild, and tranquil evening like the present?"

"It has been a favourite subject," answered Lesmore, "with so many writers, that it were hard to decide by which it has been most successfully treated. None, however, who have expressly chosen, not merely incidentally introduced it, has been more universally admired than the enthusiastic and animated Collins."

"His Ode to Evening," said Mr. Archer, "I know, is much celebrated and approved; but, I confess, it is so long since I read it, that I scarcely retain any recollection of its peculiar beauties. When we return to the house we will look at it."

"O no," cried I, "the house would spoil it. This is the moment, and this the spot, to hear it to advantage; and Geraldine can repeat it."

"Well, then," said Mr. Archer, "let us have it."

Geraldine, thus called upon, summoned

all her courage, and, after a short pause, begun:

"If ought of oaten stop, or pastoral song," &c.

Mr. Archer was extremely pleased, not only with the poem, but with her ready compliance; he particularly approved the twelve concluding lines; praised her intelligent and unaffected mode of delivery, and exhorted her never to neglect the cultivation of so correct and enviable a memory.

After this, the conversation turned upon the subject of modern poetry in general; and some of our party could not forbear animadverting, rather severely, upon the frippery taste, the rage for epithets, the unmeaning and insipid sentimentality that has abounded in many hot-pressed recent productions, embellished with elegant engravings.

"We laughed in former days," said Mr. Archer, "at the plausible galimatias of the well-known love song,

"Fluttering spread thy purple pinions,
"Gentle Cupid!" &c.

but it seems to me as if the same sort of nonsense was now written in sober sadness, and gravely mistaken for refinement and delicacy."

"I scarcely know any poet of modern date," said Lesmore, "whose productions have afforded me more genuine pleasure than Burns. Many of his compositions are extremely melancholy, and some are even tinctured with bitterness and asperity; but they are so original, the feeling they express is so wholly divested of affectation, such indications of a warm and generous heart, such manly strength of thought, and, from time to time, such vivid flashes of genius break forth, that he not only excites, but rivets our attention, and insensibly awakens for himself our most partial interest and regard."

"You speak enthusiastically, my dear Lesmore."

"I speak with the admiration I always experience when I take up a volume of his poems."

"I must make myself better acquainted

with this favourite bard of yours. Geraldine, have you got his works in your little library?"

"Yes, my dear uncle."

"And are you as zealous an advocate for him as Lesmore?"

She professed exactly the same sentiments, and specified some of the poems which she most admired. This led to a request from Ferdinand, that, if she could remember, she would recite one of them.

After a moment's consideration, she selected and repeated the stanzas entitled, from their plaintive burthen, "Man was made to mourn."

I wish, my dear Augusta, you could have shared in the pleasing though melancholy sensations with which we heard her. So grateful to the ear was the well-regulated tone of her voice; so impressive the lines themselves, and so affecting, yet so natural, the expression with which she uttered them, that as I listened to her, as I surveyed her light and graceful form, and saw her fine eyes cast upwards, and glittering in the

moon-beams "with undropt tears," I thought it impossible to behold a more interesting representative of beauty, innocence, and sensibility.

I know not how Ferdinand looked, for his face was overshadowed by the boughs of a luxuriant shrub growing near him; but I have reason to believe he was penetrated and softened, for when she ceased, he expressively said—

"To hear, in such a scene, poetry I so much love, repeated in such accents, is greater luxury than I ever experienced!"

Geraldine hastily turned her head, as if to convince herself that words so flattering indeed proceeded from the lips of my brother! I myself almost doubted whether I had heard aright, till Davenant, with a laugh, cried out,

"Why, Lesmore, we shall have *you* turning soneteer, for the mere pleasure of hearing Miss Fauconberg rehearse your effusions!"

"Are you sure," said I, that Miss Fau-

conberg would think them worth committing to memory?"

"I don't know how that might be with regard to her; but I have heard other ladies repeat Lesmore's verses."

"Indeed! and who were those ladies?" inquired I, little dreaming of the indiscretion I was leading poor Davenant to commit.

"Why, all last season, at Brighton, Mrs. Neville was singing airs to which he had composed words; and even recited in company, short poems of his, which he had addressed to her."

"Pooh, pooh!" cried I, "they were none of his own composition, I dare say." And then rising, to put an end to the conversation, I asked Geraldine to go back with me to the house.

A few moments after we had entered the drawing-room, the three ladies returned from N——, and nothing more was said of Mrs. Neville that night.

But this morning, an old maiden lady,

Mrs. Sibylla Milbanke, who lives about four miles from hence, and pays a formal half-yearly visit at Highgrove Park, about Michaelmas and Lady-day, called, and obliged Geraldine and myself, who were very busy in the dressing-room, to go down and receive her.

We soon found that she had brought with her a budget of news, which she was eager to impart; for scarcely had we been five minutes in the room, before she thus, in a little cracked nasal voice, begun—

"Well, Miss Fauconberg, I hear you are soon to have a mighty gay neighbour at Westhill. I give you joy; for her house, I am told, will be the resort of every thing that is fashionable in the county—I am speaking of the brilliant widow Neville: you know her, I think, Miss Lesmore?"

"I never was introduced to her, madam."

"Well, but, at least, your brother knows her!" added she, with a facetious nod, "I had a friend last year at Brighton, who wrote me word"——

"My brother, madam," interrupted I (Ferdinand was not present during this notable conversation), "has been acquainted with Lord M——, Mrs. Neville's relation and particular friend, several years; and you probably heard she was in the house with his lordship, the whole time she staid at Brighton."

"Very true, very true, my dear. But as I was telling you, this dashing widow is to take possession of her new house next week; and I have been assured that nothing can exceed the elegance with which she is fitting it up. She had a large fortune when she married, most of which was settled upon herself; and now, having no little ones, I suppose she finds that, without inconvenience, she can gratify her taste for magnificence. I am mighty curious to see the house, I must own: for I am informed she has had every thing down new from London, upon the most fashionable Parisian models. In all the best apartments, the curtains and hangings are silk, richly fringed."—

In short, for I tire of writing her minute gossip, from curtains she proceeded to chairs, tables, beds, sofas, carpets, and spared us no iota of detail respecting any one article of ornament or furniture throughout the house; the different colours of the silk hangings, the size, height, and breadth of the mirrors; the form of the chimney clocks, and the pattern of the bell ropes! We listened with due complacency; and, at the expiration of three quarters of an hour, which she might boast to have spent by no means idly, she rung for her little rhubarb-coloured chariot, and ambled away.

When Geraldine and I were once more established in the dressing-room, she said,

"I shall like very much to be acquainted with this Mrs. Neville when she comes to Westhill. I am curious to see the sort of woman Mr. Lesmore admires."

"My dear Geraldine," said I, "you are not aware how common a thing it is at all sea-bathing, or public places, to set up some fashionable woman as a temporary idol, a rallying point, round which all the

idle young men of *ton* flutter and flirt for the season, and then never think of again."

She confessed her ignorance of such subjects, and began talking of something else.

We are going to be very gay. Two invitations have arrived to-day, both of which are accepted: one is to a dinner at Mr. and Mrs. Everley's; the other to a splendid ball, given by a baronet in this neighbourhood, Sir James Charlebury, in honour of our late public successes. The ladies are all to be dressed in uniform, with emblematical ornaments allusive to the occasion. My mother, Geraldine, and I, have already written up to town for our paraphernalia. Madame de St. Hermine and Caroline, though included in the invitation, have declined it. The latter, indeed, will be gone from hence before the ball takes place. Geraldine calculates that her miniature of the little boy will be in such a state of forwardness by Monday as not to require any more sittings. Ferdinand finished his drawing of him this morning. On Tuesday, therefore, I fear we shall lose my sister,

who is impatient to rejoin the rest of her little family.

We have just heard that the Everleys are amongst the company invited to Sir James's *fête*; and I should not be at all surprised if my mother was to consign Geraldine and me to their care for the evening. She seems half to repent having accepted the invitation; talks of the distance, the bad roads, the late hour at which we shall return; and gives me a strong suspicion, that before to-morrow she will write to countermand all the things ordered from town.

Good night, my dear Augusta.

LETTER VIII.

TO THE SAME.

August 31st.

If Lesmore does not, at last, do justice to the merits of our inestimable Geraldine, let us all disown any connexion with him!

A few days ago, Mr. Archer, having heard some of our party express a wish to practice shooting with bows and arrows, had a target put up near the house, and every morning since, Davenant, Geraldine, and I, have gone out as soon as breakfast was over, and spent near an hour in trying our skill with these new playthings.

Yesterday when we sallied forth as usual on this wise errand, my brother chose to accompany us, and take part in the amusement. Madame de St. Hermine and Mr. Archer likewise attended us, and stood as spectators and umpires of our dexterity. Ferdinand proved to be an admirable marks-

man, and shamed even our original instructor, Davenant; who once, I know not by what misconduct or mismanagement, shot his arrow so completely out of its intended direction, that it as nearly as possible struck against my brother's shoulder, as he stood on one side, talking with Madame de St. Hermine. Geraldine, who either saw it coming, or guessed from Davenant's awkward manner of holding it, what was likely to happen, precipitately drew Ferdinand back, and saved him the pain of a pretty severe bruise. At first, unconscious of her motive for making such a seizure, he looked at her with amazement; but on hearing the business explained, his surprise gave way to feelings of obligation, and he thanked her in the most animated terms. She laughed at his gratitude; disclaimed the least title to it, and declared she hardly knew who it was she drew away, but, at the moment, acted entirely from a mechanical impulse. I do not think Lesmore much liked this interpretation of her conduct. It appeared to me as if he had rather

have been allowed to suppose he owed his escape to her vigilant anxiety for his preservation. All these saucy men are prodigiously disposed to imagine themselves of great consequence; and very apt to be affronted and sullen when they find themselves mistaken.

The next person who was to take aim happened unfortunately to be me. At the moment I was pulling the string of the bow, poor little Charles, perfectly unsuspicious of the danger he was incurring, came suddenly from behind some trees, and seeing Ferdinand, ran towards him across the ground that was between me and the target, and, before any body could save him, was thrown down by the force with which the blunt, but rapid and heavy arrow, struck against his arm!

Oh, Augusta! had any one, at that moment, taken the same weapon and aimed it against me, I believe I should have been thankful. Unconsciously, I was flying towards the house, without aim or project, when Geraldine, preserving that admirable

presence of mind with which she is so peculiarly blessed, called me back, and besought me not to carry the alarm within doors, and terrify Mrs. Davenant and my mother with any sudden information of what had happened. Then seating herself on the ground, and gently raising and supporting the little sufferer, she asked Madame de St. Hermine whether it would not be right immediately to cut open the sleeve of his nankeen dress?

"Yes, certainly."

"Then," resumed she, "whilst I do that, let somebody go for our apothecary; he is very skilful as a surgeon, and may be here in less than half an hour."

Davenant, on hearing this, said he would ride and fetch him himself. Madame de St. Hermine directed him which road to take, and he instantly left us to run towards the stables.

Meanwhile, Geraldine, having borrowed a knife, was opening, with a light but steady hand, the sleeve of Charles's coat. Ferdinand knelt by her, and held the child's arm,

who, aware of their intended kindness, made no resistance, but, on the contrary, appeared grateful for their care. The measure our young friend had suggested, proved the wisest that could have been pursued; for, in a very short time, the little tender limb swelled so considerably, that it would have been equally difficult and painful to have attempted getting it released. When this first relief was effected, Lesmore took him in his arms, and carried him to the nursery. Scarcely had the infant hero shed a tear from the moment he received the hurt: but encouraged by his uncle's commendations of his manliness and spirit, and fearful of grieving his kind attendant, Miss Fauconberg, he repressed all complaints, and displayed the most extraordinary self-command.

Madame de St. Hermine now besought Geraldine to take upon herself the task of announcing the accident to Caroline, and went in person to my mother to execute the same unthankful office.

Shocked, humbled, and dejected, I was

leaving them, to bend my melancholy steps towards the nursery, when Geraldine, detaining me a moment, and affectionately embracing me, said:

"My dearest Julia, reproach not yourself for an accident so wholly unintentional. No lasting ill effects will result from it, I am persuaded; and you will grieve us all if you suffer your kind heart to be thus distressed."

Ferdinand, who had by this time rejoined us, united with her in endeavouring to console me; and then, whilst Geraldine went up to my sister, returned again to the nursery with me.

The child was lying upon his bed, and, to judge by the flush in his cheeks, seemed to be in great pain: but forbore all murmurs, and even looked up at us with a faint smile. His arm, however, was frightfully discoloured, and the swelling seemed increased. My apprehensions exceeded all bounds! I besought the housekeeper, who now entered the room, to prepare some application for the part; to attempt, at least,

giving him some relief; and when Caroline appeared, so guilty and so fearful did I feel, that, unable to look at her, I sunk upon my knees by the bed-side, and buried my face in the quilt. Her voice, addressing me in accents of kindness, first gave me courage to raise my head; I transferred it from the bed to her lap, and there, pressing her two hands between mine, as she sat by her boy's pillow, I wept like a child. Ferdinand was concerned to behold my useless sorrow, and endeavoured to draw me out of the room; but I refused to leave it till the surgeon arrived, and he desisted from the attempt.

After an interval that appeared to me, that appeared to us all, of incalculable duration, the medical man was at length announced. His report gave unexpected comfort to the whole family. He ordered what he thought necessary, recommended us to keep the child quiet for the rest of the day, and, promising to call again in the evening, went away, leaving me in a state of comparative blessedness.

The thanks and praises that were bestow-

ed upon Geraldine for her rational yet active services, were innumerable. She shrunk from them with blushes, and the most unaffected modesty; and, except from Madame de St. Hermine, whose judicious commendations, never lavished upon trifles, always appear to exalt her in her own eyes, showed a sincere wish to escape hearing any thing more upon the subject.

How infinitely to the credit is it of both pupil and instructress, that she who has the oftenest and the most freely expressed blame, should likewise be the person from whose lips praise is the most gratifying! Geraldine often says, that the slightest testimony of approbation from Madame de St. Hermine, gives her more heart-felt content than would the most elaborate professions of admiration from any other lips. "I am so confident," she added, "of her scrupulous sincerity, that she is to me like a second conscience; and till I know her opinion of any action, I scarcely dare trust to my own. Others, without her frankness,

might have only her affection and benevolence."

In the evening, poor Charles showed symptoms of amendment. Some one of the family sat watching by him the whole day: even Lesmore was very frequently in his room, and evinced an anxiety concerning him, that did him great honour in the tender mother's eyes. To-day, I am truly rejoiced to add, our dear little patient is wonderfully better; and I have now reason to flatter myself my dreadful clumsiness will produce no future mischief.

If the progress of his recovery keeps pace with our hopes, we all dine to-morrow at Mrs. Everley's. I promised you some further account of that lady. Have patience, Augusta; in due time I will honourably fulfil my engagement: perhaps, to-morrow morning. Meanwhile, adieu.

LETTER IX.

MISS LESMORE—IN CONTINUATION.

September 1st.

THEY are reading a dry, dull book in the library; Geraldine is busy practising in her dressing-room; the gentlemen are out shooting, and I am come up to communicate to you the little history of Mrs. Everley. It was related to me by Madame de St. Hermine, who, probably, learnt it from the lips of its fair heroine.

Though young, handsome, and formed by her manners and conversation to be the ornament and delight of society, Mrs. Everley, during the early period of her marriage, was almost totally debarred from holding intercourse even with the nearest of her neighbours. Her husband, considerably older than herself, and accustomed to indulge in recluse and sedentary habits, ad-

mitted no visitors into his house but men of his own age, his long-tried and intimate friends. To these, Mrs. Everley started no objection; on the contrary, her mind was sufficiently cultivated to enable her at times to derive infinite entertainment from the various subjects of their conversation, however serious they might be: but there were other moments, when, recollecting the gay and animated scenes she had witnessed and borne a part in whilst under her father's roof, her spirits failed her, and she sighed to think she had renounced for ever amusements and society so congenial to her character and time of life, for the gravity, the rigid exclusion of all novelty, and the clock-work precision of her present home. The daughter of a respectable country gentleman, who was possessed of a sufficient income to bring up a large family with ease and elegance, she had never, till her marriage, experienced a lonely or melancholy hour. Surrounded by brothers and sisters, all affectionately attached to her and to each other; cherished by parents whose happiness was wrapt up

in that of their children; loved for her temper, and admired for her accomplishments, she was not only regarded by others as one of the most enviable favourites of nature and fortune, but felt a grateful consciousness herself of the blessings she possessed.

From this state of rare but true domestic felicity, she was first withdrawn by the influence Mr. Everley obtained over her. At the time he first became known to her, he was by no means, in regard to external appearance, an ineligible pretender to her favour. His person and deportment were completely those of a gentleman; his countenance denoted understanding; and, with the advantages of fine teeth and good eyes, he was not wholly undeserving the denomination of handsome. In addition to this, his intellectual endowments were so highly superior to those of the generality of men she had conversed with, that the attention with which, at a very early period of their acquaintance, he distinguished her, no less flattered her vanity, than the apparent

equanimity of his temper, and benevolence of his disposition, interested her heart. She prided herself upon the reputation for sense and discernment, which a choice, proclaiming such maturity of judgement, would secure to her; and fancied, that in becoming the wife of a scholar, a man whose character as a connoisseur in literature, and a patron of learning, stood so high, she entitled herself to some share in the honours that were paid to him.

Actuated by motives such as these, she sanctioned Mr. Everley's application to her father, before it was suspected by a single individual of her family, that the assiduities of which she had been the object, had made any serious impression upon her mind. How to discountenance such a proposal, appeared difficult; yet father, mother, all who were of an age to give an opinion upon the affair, felt a repugnance to consenting to so disproportioned a match, which not any of its advantages in respect to pecuniary considerations, could, in their eyes, obviate or counterbalance. The fated

bride, however, appeared irrevocably determined to abide by her sapient choice: the but too probable regrets to which she was condemning herself, were represented to her in vain; opposition, for the first time in her life, had the effect of rendering her invincibly self-willed: and though at first her acquiescence had resulted from a foolish idea of acquiring consequence by such a union, parental admonitions soon gave to her motives a colouring of romance, and she, at last, very seriously imagined herself impelled to the deed, by a passion as ardent and unconquerable, as it was, the object considered, laudable and rational.

The marriage consequently was, in the end, acceded to; and from that moment to the hour of its celebration, showers of odes, sonnets, lyrical and pastoral compositions, poured from the fertile pen of the inspired lover, and were, by turns, addressed to his fascinated fair one, to her mother, her five sisters, her canary bird, her gold fishes, and her dutch pug. These little productions, insipid as their subjects frequently were,

possessed, notwithstanding, the merit of being coined with facility and taste: they enraptured the young bride-elect; and the well-chosen nuptial presents with which they were generally accompanied, still more enraptured her less poetically-enthusiastic sisters.

The marriage-ceremony over, Mrs. Everley and her newly-wedded lord set out immediately for the usual residence of the latter in this county. The regret with which her friends saw her depart, was aggravated by the ill-boding silence observed by Mr. Everley upon the subject of the future intercourse of the two families. He invited none of her relations to visit him, nor even dropped the slightest hint of any intention speedily to bring her to see them. This omission, however, his bride, affectionately attached as she was to her natural friends, scarcely seemed to remark. In Mr. Everley, she imagined herself secure of a companion, who would amply compensate to her for every other privation: he was to address *Parnassus talk* to her, all day long;

to open to her mind the stores of knowledge with which his own was so richly fraught; to make of her a philosopher, a botanist, an astronomer, a mathematician, and a chemist; to clear to her, by patient definition, all the mysteries of science; to stimulate her by encouragement, and to reward her by tenderness.

These flattering but illusive expectations retained their hold a few weeks, and then gradually, but for ever, vanished! Mr. Everley, long accustomed to a solitary mode of learned occupation, found himself, in a short time, most wofully incommoded by the association to which his blooming partner aspired. She was indefatigably attentive, had ready powers of comprehension, and showed the most exemplary docility; but, compared to him, she was as ignorant as an infant. To abandon, therefore, all his favourite pursuits, in order, by slow degrees, to impart the very rudiments of knowledge to one totally unacquainted even with the common terms of art; a stranger to every language but her own and

the French; a grammarian more by ear than principle; a calculator instructed only in the first four rules of arithmetic—to wade through the drudgery of communicating learned ideas to one so unprovided with every species of fundamental information, appeared to him a task no less wearisome than unprofitable. He married her, to obtain, in his hours of leisure, a gentle, good-humoured, enlivening companion; one who could, when he felt inclined to unbend his mind from severer studies, participate with him in the pleasures to be derived from works of imagination; from historical or moral compositions; or from the lighter effusions of his own fancy: but to find, or to make of her a Madame Dacier, would have surpassed at once his expectation and his wishes.

The discovery of these discouraging sentiments in her undissembling help-mate, speedily terminated all Mrs. Everley's high-soaring flights into the regions of science: and scarcely knowing whether to be glad or sorry, that for the close application, and

laborious efforts she had so heroically planned, no call would ever be made, she had recourse once again to her former more humble occupations—her drawing, her embroidery, and her piano-forte; varying these employments, as inclination prompted, by visits to the green-house, rambles through her husband's grounds, walks to the neighbouring cottages, and occasional examinations of the contents of the library. Here, however, scarcely more than one book out of twenty met her sight, the language or the subject of which she could understand. This was somewhat a melancholy circumstance; and as winter came on, and she found herself debarred from her accustomed walks, and confined wholly to her own or her husband's equally silent fire-side, the deprivation became almost intolerable. Mr. Everley, wrapped in a long dressing-gown, and seated at a writing-table, his feet in slippers, "his hose ungartered," his mind abstracted, and his conversation restricted to a few brief sentences, such as—"Pray, my dear, snuff the candles;" or, "Pray,

my dear, stir the fire," was no object either to enliven her spirits or amuse her fancy. Of the poet, the man of genius, and the communicative scholar she had so much admired, nothing now appeared but his former facility in making verses. These, as occasions offered, were poured upon her with as great profusion as ever: she accepted them graciously; read them once; thought some of them pretty; threw them down, and, without reflection or remorse, lighted her taper with the first that happened afterwards to fall in her way.

From this depressing state of vegetation she was rescued by the friendly interference of our excellent Mr. Archer. He saw her at her own house, doing the honours of her table to a party of gentlemen; looking half-animated, appearing crushed beneath a weight of gloom and *ennui*; no relation near her; no acquaintance in the county; —in short, conveying to him by her dejected but mild aspect, the idea of a captive bird pining for its native groves, its early companions, and its lost liberty.

He proposed, not to her, but to her husband, making her acquainted with his niece; and, construing that gentleman's silent bow into a free assent, he delayed no further than till the next morning carrying Geraldine to pay them her first visit. He speedily after directed his young ward to write to the poor prisoner, and ask her to dinner; rode over in person with the note to Oakley Lodge, delivered it into Mr. Everley's own hands, and accompanied it with a cordial invitation to himself.

His frank and friendly solicitations were not to be resisted. The long-secluded couple came; they experienced the most flattering reception; were introduced to Madame de St. Hermine; courted and attended to with the highest good-breeding; and from that time to the present moment (a period of above twelve months) have lived upon the most intimate footing with every inhabitant of Highgrove Park. Mr. Everley has inspired Geraldine with a taste for botany; given her some knowledge of fossils and minerals; he addresses verses to her

perpetually; he admires and loves her; and, to her solicitation, there is scarcely any thing he would deny. He permits her to introduce his wife to whom she pleases; allows her to arrange with Mrs. Everley the parties he is to have at his own house; and has even half promised to spend two months in town next spring. What a blessed metamorphosis is this for his poor wife. She feels no jealousy of the influence Geraldine has acquired, but manifests for her on all occasions the affection of a sister. Madame de St. Hermine encourages their intimacy, and stands extremely high herself in Mr. Everley's good graces.

Adieu—I must hasten to dress for dinner. Charles continues recovering.

Yours ever,

Julia Lesmore.

LETTER X.

TO THE SAME.

Sept. 2.

OUR visit yesterday, my dear Augusta, was remarkably pleasant. Mr. Everley is throwing aside, as fast as he can, all his old batchelor habits and disagreeable whims. His wife is restored to all her natural cheerfulness; and they now appear a perfectly contented couple.

Their house is beautifully situated, and the grounds are richly wooded in almost every direction; but such cumbersome, unwieldy, and antiquated furniture as the apartments are disfigured with, I never saw in any other place. Mrs. Everley's dressing-room is the only part of the house that contains a chair fit for a woman to lift. Yet even that retreat is rendered gloomy and dark by high casement windows, overshadowed with huge trees growing so close to

them that neither light nor air can penetrate through their thick branches. In this very room, however, we saw an object with which we were singularly delighted—a portrait of Mrs. Everley's eldest brother, Colonel Courtville, painted by one of our ablest artists when the colonel was only a youth of fifteen or sixteen. He is represented in a Spanish habit, and wearing the becoming hat and feather peculiar to that nation. Mrs. Everley has but lately obtained possession of this treasure, and values it most highly; for, independent of the resemblance it possibly bears to her brother, such a painting is to be prized for its own intrinsic merit. The features, expression, attitude of the head, all are exquisite. I will not say that the countenance looks very wise; but few perfectly regular faces do: at all events, it denotes great sweetness and good-nature. I told Geraldine she ought to paint a miniature from it, and Mrs. Everley has promised to lend it to her for that purpose whenever she chooses to send for it.

A great deal of conversation passed during dinner and afterwards upon the subject of Sir James Charleburg's approaching ball. My mother asked Mr. and Mrs. Everley whether they did not both intend to go?

"Let Mrs. Everley," replied he, "answer for herself. There," looking at Geraldine, "sits the person who must decide the matter for me. Do I go, Miss Fauconberg, or not?"

"Why, I rather think not," answered she, laughing; "you would not dance, I am afraid, and therefore you may as well stay at home and plan a poetical description of the fête."

"Thank you for this reprieve! I have been in hourly dread of your award upon this subject ever since the invitation arrived."

"You must admit me, I believe," said my mother, "to participate in your poetical lucubrations that evening; for I have, to the full, as great a horror of the thoughts of this ball as yourself."

"Cannot the young ladies go under the

protection of Mrs. Everley and the gentlemen of your party?"

"Perfectly well," cried Mr. Archer, "Lesmore and I both mean to attend them."

"And however unsuitable a partner," interrupted Ferdinand, "I may be for one of the ladies, yet, I hope the other," directing his eyes towards Geraldine, "will do me the honour of considering herself as engaged to me."

Geraldine looked a little surprised, but bowed her assent; and it was agreed that we should call for Mrs. Everley, whose house is in the direct road to Sir James's, and place ourselves under her care for the night.

The ball is on Wednesday. Magnificent preparations are making for it; the whole county is invited, and the highest expectations are entertained by every body. Geraldine is in great spirits upon the occasion. She has yet never been to any thing so splendid as it is supposed this will prove. I have been practising all my best steps;

mean to dance a great deal, and be very much admired!

Caroline leaves us on Tuesday. Her boy runs and plays about again as usual—and, besides, the journey will be very easy; Davenant's house being, as you may recollect, only thirty miles from this place. She and I have agreed, that as your good man is the only *franking convenience* in our family, I shall continue to address most of my letters to you. Those that you think worth her seeing, you are to forward to Caroline as soon as you have read them.

Geraldine has completely finished her picture of Charles, procured for it a case, and delivered it to his mother, who is enchanted with the gift and the giver.

You must not expect to hear from me again till the ball is over. Farewel, my dear sister.

J. L.

LETTER XI.

MISS LESMORE TO MRS. LUMLEY.

Sept. 6.

OH this odious ball! How I hate to think of it! Nothing did it bring to me but chagrin and regret. Poor Geraldine! Hear what a disappointment I was the occasion of her suffering, and then judge what pleasure I could myself enjoy during any part of the evening.

Our dancing-dresses, which we expected from town on Tuesday night, or, at latest, early the next morning, were not arrived when we sat down yesterday to dinner. We looked very blank at this delay, I must own; for we had neither of us any equipment, which, as to colour, suited the description of the uniform we were expected to wear, nor any ornaments appropriate to the occasion. We were to call for Mrs.

Everley, ready dressed, at half-past eight. Nine o'clock struck, however, before the box containing our apparel arrived. It had been delayed by some accident which we staid not to hear explained: but following Madame de St. Hermine's advice, who thought Mrs. Everley would be uneasy till our tardiness was accounted for, we jumped into Mr. Archer's carriage, and drove directly to Oakley Lodge, where it was determined we should dress. Madame de St. Hermine chose to accompany us, to see us attired; and we were attended by Geraldine's maid. The two gentlemen agreed to follow us in a short time in my mother's coach.

On our arrival at Mrs. Everley's, whom we found ready, and much surprised at our being so late, we ran, with her permission, up into her apartment, followed by Jane, and the almost-despaired-of box. We both began undressing, whilst the anxious girl was busily dragging forth the finery to light, and spreading it with great admiration upon the chairs: but conceive our dis-

may, when she suddenly and shrilly exclaimed—

"Oh my good gracious! Here's a pretty job! They have sent but *one dress*, as sure as I am alive!"

Scarcely crediting such an assertion, we hastily turned round, repeating at the same instant,

"But one dress, Jane! Is it possible?"

"Oh, it's as sure as I stand here, ladies! The nasty toads must have mistaken the orders; or else, when Mrs. Lesmore wrote to forbid her own things, they thought she meant to forbid Miss Julia's also. I turned and turned every thing over fifty ways before I would speak: but I might as well have saved myself the trouble; for not another thread but what you see can I find."

Then shutting down the lid of the box to examine the direction—

"Aye, aye, they are all for you, ma'am, sure enough!" added she, addressing Geraldine, "Well, come, that is some comfort too: but, poor Miss Lesmore! I declare, I am quite sorry for her."

" You have not the least occasion, Jane," said Geraldine, quietly putting on again the gown she came in; " my things will fit Miss Lesmore, and I desire that you will immediately help her to get ready."

" No, no!" cried I, drawing back, " I would not wear them for the world!"

" Indeed, my dear Julia, you must. I have as completely made up my mind about the matter as if I had known what was to happen. It will be no grievance to me, be assured. I am quite determined you shall go, and therefore be good, and make no fuss, and let Jane assist you directly."

I still rejected the proposal with the utmost vehemence; and at that moment, Madame de St. Hermine, expecting to find us half dressed, entered the room.

I flew to her—told her the unpleasant discovery that had been made, and besought her to exert her influence over Geraldine, in order to dissuade her from making the sacrifice she meditated.

" Dissuade my beloved girl from doing what is right, hospitable, and kind? No,

never! You are her guest, and her friend, and, as such, amply entitled to the little resignation I rejoice to hear she is so ready to make."

"Ah! Madame de St. Hermine," cried I, "you think only of what reflects credit upon Geraldine, and quite disregard the pain her resolution gives me!"

"Why should it pain you, my dear Julia? Would you not, in similar circumstances, do exactly the same for her?"

"Very likely not," cried I; "such an offer might never have entered my head!"

"You wrong yourself, Julia. But we have no time for discussion. Come, submit with a good grace, as a penance for the unjust imputation you have cast upon your own character."

It was vain to make any longer resistance; I saw they were both determined; and, though with a reluctance wholly unfeigned, I suffered them to dispose of me as they pleased. I believe they made me very fine; but I had little inclination to survey myself, and still less time; Mrs.

Everley, whose concern on hearing what had happened equalled mine, growing quite impatient to set out. Mr. Archer and Ferdinand had not yet joined us: we waited ten minutes for them after I went down stairs; but then the lady of the house, fearing her going so late would be construed into a saucy air, rung the bell for her carriage, declaring she would delay her departure no longer.

As I left the room, I said to Geraldine, "Pray, when your uncle, and your intended partner, see me in my borrowed trappings, how am I to have courage to look them in the face?"

"As for my uncle," answered she, "tell him the truth; and as for Mr. Lesmore, say something very civil to him in my name; entreat him to call up all his philosophy, and endeavour to bear his disappointment like a man!"

"Are you so unjust, then, as to think he will not be very truly concerned at your absence?"

"How is it *possible* I should think otherwise?"

She uttered this with a look of mock gravity, and an air of expostulation so irresistibly comic, that I could have laughed heartily had it been said of any body but Lesmore. She gave me no leisure, however, to remonstrate with her, but hurrying me to Mrs. Everley's carriage, wished us both good night, stepped into her uncle's, and, with Madame de St. Hermine and the disappointed Jane, drove home.

During their short ride, as I was told this morning, a coach passed them on the road which they concluded was my mother's; and they both rejoiced that the two gentlemen would arrive at Sir James's so nearly at the same time with our party.

Every thing at Mr. Archer's door was perfectly quiet when they stopped at it; and alighting without asking any questions, they proceeded to the drawing-room. It was empty, my mother having already retired to her own chamber: but as it was

still early, they both felt disinclined to follow her example; Madame de St. Hermine, therefore, took up a book, and Geraldine placed herself at the piano-forte.

She was singing, with newly-restored powers, having but lately recovered from a severe cold, a favourite air of Madame de St. Hermine's, which drew off all that lady's attention from the book she held, when, to their inexpressible surprise, my brother entered the room.

"Mr. Lesmore!" exclaimed Madame de St. Hermine; "why, how does this happen? We thought you were on your road to Sir James Charleburg's!"

"Believe me," answered he, "my appearance cannot more astonish you, than Miss Fauconberg's does me! I thought she was *at* Sir James Charleburg's!"

"But how comes it," resumed Madame de St. Hermine, "that you are not gone? Where is Mr. Archer?"

"Just awaking from a sound nap which seized him soon after you went to Oakley Lodge, and which, recollecting he had been

out, shooting, the whole morning, I had not the resolution to shorten or disturb."

"That was considerate and kind!" softly observed Geraldine.

"But now," added Lesmore, "tell me, why is it I find Miss Fauconberg here?"

Before this inquiry could be answered, Mr. Archer made his appearance.

"Am I still dreaming," cried he, rubbing his eyes, "or are you really my niece Geraldine? What is the matter, child? Why are you not dancing and flirting at the ball? Do you think you shall go with me in that trumpery, every-day gown?"

"She has nothing else for it," said Madame de St. Hermine; "unless, indeed, she goes stupidly to bed."

She then, simply and briefly, related what had passed.

Mr. Archer was enchanted. He kissed the cheek of his pleased and grateful niece; told her that the most brilliant birthday suit would never render her half so handsome in his eyes as such an act of cheerful good-nature; and prognosticated to her the

pleasantest dreams she had ever had in her life.

Ferdinand, though less avowedly, was, Madame de St. Hermine assures me, equally charmed. He gazed, she said, at Geraldine with an expression of new-born respect, and heart-felt admiration; and when Mr. Archer ceased speaking, acknowledged her goodness to me in the warmest terms; adding,

"I cannot, however, but lament, even after the example of self-denial you have set me, that I am thus, Miss Fauconberg, to be deprived of my partner! May I, for this loss, claim a compensation?"

"Pray what is it to be?"

"I have never yet," resumed he, "except as I entered the room a few minutes since, had the pleasure of hearing you sing. This may seem an odd time to solicit such a favour: but Mr. Archer, I know, is in no haste to be gone; nor now, to say the truth, am I. Will you, then, 'without let or hindrance,' allow me to hear the whole of

the air of which I only indistinctly caught a part?"

"You have admirably," answered she, laughing, "proportioned the recompense to the loss!"

Saying this, she resumed her seat at the instrument, and, without hesitation, or the slightest confusion, complied with his request. Do you know, Augusta, this total exemption from all that embarrassment she but recently experienced in Ferdinand's presence, appears to me a sign *de mauvaise augure?* It looks as if, now her apprehensions of him are dissipated by the habit of daily intercourse, no other impression had taken their place in her mind; as if she felt towards him nothing but the most tranquil and determined indifference.—Ah! if such is the case, how severely will Lesmore's ill-founded prejudices against her be punished!

We have often observed the happy effect which singing always produces upon the countenance of this dear girl. Lovely as she is, yet never does she look so beautiful

as when thus employed; her mouth, particularly, is embellished by it to a wonderful degree: no grimaces, no affectation, disfigure the symmetry of her features; but her whole aspect is lighted up by an air of genuine sensibility, a sort of supplicating softness, that has, more than once, affected me nearly as much as her exquisite sweetness of voice, and truly Italian taste.

My brother, Madame de St. Hermine told me, stood leaning against the pianoforte in such a direction, that he could discern every variation of her expressive face. She is sure he experienced the strongest emotion. "He looked," she added, "as if

"Possess'd beyond the Muse's painting—
"By turns he felt the glowing mind
"Disturb'd, delighted, rais'd, refin'd!"

"And this," she continued, "is not a mere poetical flight, a vague *façon de parler*. I seriously assure you, that no countenance ever more visibly portrayed a mind 'wrapt,' enchanted, touched!—Ah! my dear Julia, let us but once succeed in undermining the

rash systems, the youthful asperities, the romantic fastidiousness of his too highly-wrought imagination, and we shall have this proud but noble feeling, and generous Lesmore, at our Geraldine's feet! They will weave their own nets, if we abstain from interference; and catch and bind each other more securely than any arts or insinuations of ours could effect."

"But, madam, has not Geraldine imbibed sentiments of aversion, at least of cool, unconcerned apathy, respecting him, yet more hopeless and unpromising?"

"That is all fair, my dear child," answered she, smiling. "He has treated her with such marked negligence, such unconcealed disregard, that she could not avoid learning either to hate, or to grow utterly indifferent about him. Of the first, her nature is incapable; and at the second I am by no means alarmed. All her easy and provokingly unembarrassed civility to him, will, ere long, vanish; and we shall see her, sooner perhaps than you are aware, look-

ing as much like a simpleton, as shy, and as uncomfortable as heart could wish."

When the song was over, Madame de St. Hermine, looking at her watch, warned both Mr. Archer and Lesmore to depart.

"I wished your brother," said she, "to go whilst the impression Geraldine had made was fresh upon his mind, whilst the tones of her soul-subduing voice still vibrated in his ear. He was evidently extremely reluctant to leave us; but I insisted upon it, and the carriage was ordered round. Now, my dear Julia, let me hear what passed at the ball. Did he there say any thing to you concerning your friend?"

I told her, that when he entered I was dancing with a gentleman Miss Charleburg had introduced to me; but as soon as my engagement ended, I went up to him with Mrs. Everley.

"Ferdinand," said I, "I am ashamed of being here; ashamed of having consented to avail myself of the kindness that was almost forced upon me."

"You are not the only one, my dear

Julia, who has reason to be ashamed whenever the recollection of Miss Fauconberg rises to mind!"

He said this with a sort of serious half-smile, more expressive than the words themselves; but, presently assuming a less conscious look, he added,

"I believe she is of a disposition to which the performance of every good is so essentially necessary for the gratification of her own feelings, that it is superfluous ever to be concerned at her doing too much!"

"Who is this tremendously perfect creature?" said a voice just behind us. We hastily turned our heads, and beheld Mrs. Neville.

Ferdinand coloured with surprise; perhaps, with pleasure also. I started with vexation; for this lady is, I own, of all others, the one I least wished to meet in the vicinity of Highgrove Park.

Their mutual greetings were frank, animated, and cordial. Mrs. Neville, ill-disposed as I am towards her, I cannot but allow, looked beautiful; yet, in less than

five minutes, I heard her beginning to abuse her own appearance, and that of every one present, with the most unmerciful severity.

"Were you ever," said she to my brother, "at a more stupid, unmeaning, tasteless raree-show, than the one we have now the honour to make a part of? Look at half the women in company, myself included, disguised and disfigured by colours as unsuitable to their faces, as if they had been maliciously chosen for that very purpose: look at the other, exulting and simpering at the fortunate conformity to their sallow skins of the odious livery we have been forced to assume. Observe the wearisome uniformity of the *coup d'œil;* the great unbroken mass of inelegant sameness, which strikes and fatigues the beholder! From the moment I entered the room, I have been making comparisons in my own mind, between the endless continuity of hue and decoration here displayed, and the immense, level, uninterrupted, green plain, in which Madame de Genlis condemns a fickle co-

quette, in one of her tales*, to pace for thirty years, with slow and measured solemnity of step, as a cure for her volatility. And a very infallible one it might prove, to judge by the soporific effect this unvaried and uninteresting scene, the very counterpart of that she describes, has produced upon me."

"You have less reason for complaint," said Ferdinand, laughing, "than most of those who are present; since the fertility of your own fancy can always supply you with abundant sources of amusement."

"No; this spot deadens all fancy. I can think of nothing but the monotonous green plain, and the yawning flirt who was sentenced to linger out upon it so many precious years of her existence. Besides, how cruel to make us hate the resemblance of the heroes of our country! And yet, such is the case. The continual repetition here exhibited, in lockets, broaches, fans, and medallions, of the weather-beaten faces

* Les Veillées du Chateau, Tome III. p. 344.

of those gallant conquerors in whose honour this brilliant *fête* is intended, makes me apprehensive I shall have them glaring before my eyes, at all hours of the day, for a month to come! Every thing I look at will seem to me the head of an ugly admiral; and I shall so completely lose the faculty of discrimination, that all colours will appear to me alike!"

These sarcastic, but not wholly unjust observations, drew from me an involuntary smile, which escaped not the notice of the fair critic.

"Mr. Lesmore," said she, quitting the air and tone of ridicule she had hitherto worn, and giving to her countenance an expression of graciousness and good-breeding; "I must beg to be introduced to your sister; for such I should be sure, wherever I met her, this young lady must be, by the very striking resemblance I perceive between you."

This was no clumsy *douceur*; she could not but suppose I should be flattered by a comparison to a man universally acknow-

ledged to be so handsome. However, as the compliment came from her, it gave me little pleasure; and I went through the ceremony of presentation with a tepid, a merely acquiescent civility, that seemed to disappoint and surprise her. She very soon left my neighbourhood; and walked about for the rest of the evening, attended by Lesmore, without again addressing me. She wholly declined dancing; contenting herself with looking on, and making charitable remarks upon those who did.

These "gibing spirits," as our Shakespeare calls them, always excite my dislike, unless I know they have real worth sufficient to compensate, in some measure, for so reprehensible a turn of mind. I will not assert that I never laugh at their biting jests; but laughter is no infallible criterion of approbation. Mrs. Neville's animadversions, however, were too general to deserve severe censure; and I will be candid enough to confess, that had they fallen from any other lips, I might, perhaps, have recorded them as apt and well-deserved. But, to my

"jaundiced eye," all she says and does seems tinctured with mischief.

Mr. Archer, in the course of the evening, stepped up to ask me if I knew who she was?

I told him her name, and he immediately exclaimed,

"Oh, ho! It is the recent purchaser of Westhill, is it? Upon my faith, she'll cut a dash amongst us! I never saw a finer woman. Geraldine shall go and visit her the moment we hear she has taken possession of her new house."

I was prepared for this resolution, and perfectly aware that it would be weak and imprudent to endeavour to oppose it. Geraldine, I know, wishes extremely to see Mrs. Neville; and the acquaintance, I plainly perceive, must take place.

I shall not trouble you with any further account of what passed at the ball, the most uninteresting one, to me, at which I ever remember to have been present. I danced a great deal, but with partners wholly unknown to me; harmless, good sort of gentle-

men, who were successively introduced to me by different members of the Charleburg family, and whose faces, were I to meet them again, I should hardly recollect. We supped about two o'clock, and at half past three Mrs. Everley and I declared ourselves ready to depart, and begged the gentlemen would order the carriage. Mrs. Neville went away a few minutes before us, but only made a silent and passing court'sy to me as she left the room. I have given her ample cause to dislike me, and cannot wonder at the effect my own repulsive manners have produced.

We set Mrs. Everley down at her own house, and reached Highgrove Park before five o'clock.

In the way to my own room, I had to pass that of Geraldine. I was tempted, I know not why, to take a peep at her; and for that purpose, gently opening the door, stole cautiously to the bed side. The calm repose she was enjoying, the healthy glow upon her cheeks, the sober, half-excluded light in the apartment, and the perfect still-

ness that reigned around her, contrasted so forcibly, not only with my own aching head and haggard looks, as I beheld them reflected from an opposite mirror, but with the scene of glare and bustle in which I had so recently been engaged, that I felt disgusted with myself, and hastened to throw off the unseasonable ornaments and cumbersome trappings which, I thought, gave me the air of a harassed strolling player.

It was near one o'clock before I went down to breakfast, and the whole party was dispersed. Just as I had ended my solitary meal, however, Geraldine returned from a long walk she had been taking with Madame de St. Hermine, looking so enviably gay, fresh, and blooming, that I cried out, on seeing her—

"Bring none of your provoking, animated airs here, to reproach my poor beating temples, and hollow eyes!"

"O, my poor Julia! are you paying so high a price for your evening's amusement? Come, put on a hat, and step out with me

into the garden: we will sit somewhere in the shade, and the air will revive you."

I followed her advice; and as we slowly proceeded to one of our favourite benches, she said—

"I hear Mrs. Neville was at the ball. When does she come to Westhill?"

"I really do not know. Perhaps she is established there already. It seems hardly credible that she should come all the way from Lady Rachel Sinclair's to assist at Sir James's fête."

"Were you introduced to her?"

"Yes, at her own desire."

"And how did you like her conversation?"

"Why, as well as I usually do that of people who set up for wits: I listened and laughed a little in despight of myself, and then felt tempted to find fault with every word she had uttered."

After this brief account, I changed the subject; described to her, as well as I could, the partners I had danced with; the deco-

rations of the apartments; the prevailing fashions among the ladies, &c. and completely prevented any further inquiries concerning Mrs. Neville.

This evening we are told by Mr. Archer, that she is actually settled in her new abode, and that several families in this district have already been to visit her. He has, therefore, determined that Geraldine shall follow their example without delay; and to-morrow she goes, accompanied by my mother, on this curious expedition.

How Mr. Archer obtained his information I am ignorant; not from Ferdinand we may rest assured: though I make no doubt he could have given it all from the *best authority.*

Adieu, my dearest Augusta.

Yours, most affectionately,

JULIA LESMORE.

LETTER XII.

FERDINAND LESMORE, ESQ. TO THE REV. ARCHIBALD NEWENDEN.

Highgrove Park,
Sept. 7.

My dear Sir,

YOU complain of my silence at a time when, you say, all my thoughts and feelings are peculiarly interesting to you. I can only thank you for an interest so friendly; assure you I am well; and renew the promise I made on first coming hither, of paying you a visit as soon as the period of my engagement to Mr. Archer is elapsed. For the rest—I can say nothing: my thoughts and feelings will not admit of clear definition: I scarcely comprehend them myself. One only distinct perception is left me, the nature of which is harassing and painful. When we meet, I will endeavour to be more intelligible; perhaps, by

that time, I may have learnt to understand myself.

Farewel, my most dear and respected friend.

FERDINAND LESMORE.

LETTER XIII.

MISS LESMORE TO MRS. LUMLEY.

Sept. 8.

THE visit to Mrs. Neville, my dear Augusta, is over, and I was compelled to be one of the party which drove, yesterday morning, in an open carriage, to her house. The approach to it, the grounds, the elegant simplicity of the mansion itself, would, any one of them, have charmed me, had I been in a humour to be charmed by any thing. But I went *à contre cœur*; and merely because my mother, hearing I had been introduced to Mrs. Neville at Sir James Charleburg's, insisted upon it: and the whole way we drove, I thought every thing looked ugly, except the placid, yet open and intelligent, countenance of Geraldine.

Whether struck by her appearance, or merely flattered by the promptness of her visit, I know not; but the reception Mrs. Neville gave to her was distinguishingly polite. I thought they regarded each other with mutual interest and mutual curiosity; and they both appeared pleased after the short and guarded examination had passed. Towards me, the behaviour of Mrs. Neville was as cold as I had reason to expect. My mother she treated much better; and Mr. Archer, who accompanied us, was smiled upon most courteously.

She has two tall, fashionable girls with her, Lady Elizabeth and Lady Catherine Neville, daughters of the Earl of M——, her brother-in-law. They surveyed us with silent dignity during the whole visit; appeared very proud and dull; and, I will venture to assert, are extremely ill suited to their gay hostess. She bestowed upon them very little notice; and they stared on, forgotten, and unmarked.

After some general observations on the situation of her house, the neighbourhood

she had quitted, and that to which she was come, Mrs. Neville asked Geraldine why she was not at Sir James Charleburg's ball?

"I was prevented," answered she, "by an awkward mistake of the people who were employed to make our dresses."

I longed to tell the truth, but knew not how the unostentatious Geraldine would like it; and besides, before so many strangers, had hardly courage.

"Can any thing on earth," cried Mrs. Neville, "be more clumsy than the plan of giving an entertainment from which the guests you most wish to see may be excluded by the blunders of a mantua-maker? You and I, Miss Fauconberg, will never send forth invitations clogged with such restrictions."

"No," said Geraldine; "for I could never forgive the mantua-maker whose blunders might deprive me of the pleasure of seeing you."

"Thank you; this gracious assurance makes me eager to experience the realization of your promised goodness. What say

you to encouraging, Mr. Archer, in your niece, these favourable dispositions towards a new-comer? Let her give us a ball, for the double purpose of teaching Sir James how to give his next, and of proving the sincerity of her own professions."

"I have had some project of this nature in contemplation," said Mr. Archer, "which, to bring to maturity, wanted nothing but so irresistible an application.—Come and look at our house, madam, and tell us how it is calculated for such an undertaking."

"I will do any thing which you, most docile and tractable of all uncles, desire! I have not met with so reasonable a creature these hundred years!"

The solemn sisters simpered a little on hearing of the probability of what is, perhaps, the first joy of their lives, a ball; and looked as if they were not without hopes of being included amongst the number of those who were to be invited. They seem very proper sort of persons for such a meeting: I can imagine that they perform their steps

to perfection; know how to brow-beat all competitors for the highest place in a country-dance; dress well, and make no scruple of flattering the men they wish to have for partners.

Mrs. Neville, after this, asked us to look at her green-house; described the alterations she intended making in the flower-garden; showed us a plan of her own devising for a rustic seat; conducted us to a mount commanding an extensive and admirable prospect; loaded us with a quantity of rare and beautiful carnations; and sent us all away, even me, highly gratified by our visit, and most favourably disposed towards her.

Ferdinand, who had spent the morning in the fields shooting, and was but just returned when we drove up to Mr. Archer's door, handed us from the carriage, and as we descended, said,—

"Well, did you find Mrs. Neville at home?"

"Yes," replied my mother; "and we sat with her above an hour."

Lesmore looked at Geraldine as if he wished to read in her face the opinion she had conceived of the lady in question; but she seemed not aware of his intention, and was passing on without speaking, when he stopped her to admire the variety and fragrance of her carnations.

"Mrs. Neville," said she, "has been profuse in her donations to me. Will you have one?"

He thanked her, accepted the flower she held out to him, and then added—

"Is Mrs. Neville as fond as you are of a garden?"

"I believe she is."

Poor Ferdinand could find nothing further to say, though he betrayed an evident desire of still detaining her; and she, who did not appear to have the least suspicion of his design, went quietly up stairs.

The persuasion this dear girl seems to have imbibed of the unfavourable opinion my brother entertains of her is so deeply rooted, that the prospect of ever seeing her as well-disposed towards him as we could

wish is, at present, equally unpromising and remote. She harbours against him no resentment; indulges no desire of retaliation; but appears decidedly, and calmly regardless of all his proceedings; unconcerned at his absence, almost unconscious of his presence. How must a proud and susceptible spirit like his be galled and wounded by this utter indifference! His own injurious disdain and fastidious folly incurred it. Geraldine merits no blame, even from those who may most lament the unfortunate turn affairs have taken. Could I discern in her the slightest indication of pique, of lurking anger or premeditated reserve, I should retain greater hopes; but her whole behaviour, her looks, her voice, are equally easy, cheerful, and natural. She never addresses to him an indirect reproach; makes no allusions, in his hearing, to the past; treats him, whenever he throws himself in her way, with perfect good manners; and is wholly unpreoccupied, and unaffectedly serene. The only apparent difference in her conduct towards him, and towards the rest

of the family, is this:—with us, she is caressing and familiar; she consults our tastes and opinions, and is attentive to all our wishes. Lesmore she never speaks to, unless he first addresses her; but cool, quiet, negligent, she seems so completely to forget his existence, that I have known it happen, when he has been drawing in the evening at a table close to her, and has accidentally forborne for some time to join in our conversation, she has literally *started* on first hearing again the sound of his voice!

Yesterday evening, Madame de St. Hermine was speaking of some book which Geraldine had promised to bring down to her when she came to tea.

"Have you remembered it, my love?" inquired she.

"I looked for it before I left the dressing-room," answered Geraldine, "but could no where find it. To-morrow I will renew the search."

"Is it not the same my brother borrowed of you last week?" inquired I.

"Yes, exactly; I will ask him what he has done with it when he comes in."

Now, at that very moment, Lesmore was sitting within two yards of her (somewhat in shade, I own), and had even, just before, stretched out his hand to help himself to cream from the tea-board immediately opposite to her! So palpable an instance of her inattention to him surprised us all, and occasioned a general smile. Yet, I could perceive, my brother was hurt and disconcerted, although he attempted to disguise it, and accepted the excuses which, blushing, and looking really shocked, she addressed to him, with apparent good-humour. I have given you this little anecdote as an instance, in point, of his thorough *nothingness* in her estimation.

These are ill-boding symptoms, and grieve me most sincerely. During a long ramble Ferdinand induced me to take with him this morning, I insensibly led to the subject, and frankly spoke my opinion upon it.—Amongst other things, I said, "Geraldine

would have been incapable, without provocation, of treating you with so little consideration: but perceiving that you came to the house decidedly prejudiced against her; prepared to consider her as a weak, insignificant girl, she felt the injustice; conquered the timidity and restraint the discovery first occasioned her; and resuming her native dignity and composure, seems to regard your approbation or your scorn with equal unconcern."

He heard me very patiently; and when I paused, remained silent some minutes, and then said—

"There is something in the tranquil, independent pride she manifests, disdaining to court attention where once it has been rudely withheld, which I cannot but admire. Yet I lament having given birth to it; and I am fully sensible of the rash arrogance of the judgement I formed of her.—Had she shown me those slights in return for assiduity and politeness, I should despise myself for regretting them; but they originate, I well know, with myself: and

therefore I feel no scruple in determining to bear them, and to study, by patient submission, to obliterate from her mind the remembrance of what she first knew me."

I was much pleased with these sentiments; yet, after all, I can scarcely tell why: for they are terribly rational and dispassionate! Not a shadow of love peeps forth from amidst their sententious gravity. Perhaps he was too proud to confess all the regret he experiences; or, perhaps, he looks forward, in Mrs. Neville, to a compensation for the insensibility of Miss Fauconberg. I know not exactly what to think. He certainly observes Geraldine with great interest; addresses her with a sort of hesitation amounting almost to diffidence; delights in her talents; pays invariable deference to her opinion; and is anxious to suffer no opportunity of obliging her to escape his vigilance. But these advances are cautious and gradual, and such as, I firmly believe, she has hitherto entirely overlooked.

Heaven knows how it will all end! I

own that, at present, my fears are stronger than my hopes.

Sept. 11.

For more than a week past Geraldine and I have risen every morning at seven o'clock, and rode out before breakfast.— Last night Lesmore, who had heard of these excursions, asked our permission to attend us. The request was granted; and to-day we took our first ride thus escorted.

Nothing could be more delightful than this little expedition. There is something in the appearance and feel of early day so peculiarly gay and invigorating, that whenever I have had resolution, in fine weather, to shake off the drowsiness too apt to weigh heavy upon my eye-lids, I have formed the noblest designs of habitual activity, and vowed, internally, "To meet the sun upon the upland lawn," every succeeding morning of my life. I have not always maintained these excellent determinations; a foggy, or a bleak and sullen atmosphere, puts them all to flight; and the next time I

force myself from my downy pillow, it is with a pang as if body and soul were tearing asunder! However, we have lately had a glorious succession of fine mornings, which I have enjoyed without a single relapse into indolence.

Geraldine spoke but little during our ride, and Lesmore seemed disposed to follow her example; but I would not suffer him. I said, that as he had chosen to attach himself to our party, the least he could do was, to render himself worthy of such a distinction by endeavouring to be agreeable; and, at last, I succeeded in making him very conversable and entertaining.

As we were returning home, we passed a small farm-house, occupied by people who, not being, like nearly all the other inhabitants of this district, tenants of Mr. Archer's, are wholly unknown to his niece. Two or three very fine children ran to the road-side to look at us; and before we had gone two yards beyond the door, a female, apparently pretty—certainly young—just showed herself in the porch, curt'sied, and

seemed, I thought, to regard Lesmore with the air of an old acquaintance. He perceived, I imagine, some symptoms of curiosity or surprise in my countenance, and smiled; but entered upon no explanation of the circumstance: and, in the presence of Geraldine, I deemed it wiser to forbear all direct inquiries.

In the course of the morning, Mrs. Neville drove herself here in a curricle, with one of the young ladies we saw at Westhill. We were all strolling upon the lawn in front of the house, when her elegant little equipage appeared in sight. Lesmore immediately knew the livery of the two servants who attended it, and, going to the hall door, stood upon the steps in readiness to hand her from the carriage.

In her way to the drawing-room, whither we were by this time returned, I heard her say,

"I shall be much disappointed if you do not equally admire my vehicle and my driving. Like all new play-things, it is in

high favour with me; and I expect you to be very eloquent upon it."

"We have not seen the park look so gay since I have been here," answered Ferdinand. "Your vehicle is perfection; and as to your driving, since you do every thing else well, I am very ready to believe you acquit yourself dexterously in that art also."

She now entered the drawing-room, and was received by Geraldine with a grace and good-breeding equal to her own. When Madame de St. Hermine had been introduced to her, and we had all taken our seats, she glanced her sparkling eye round the room, and said,

"I have not forgotten, Mr. Archer, the authority you delegated to me of deciding upon the *capabilities* of your house, for giving a ball. To judge by what I have seen of it, nothing can be better adapted to the purpose. In this very room, five and twenty couple might stand up with ease;—when, therefore, shall you send out your invitations?"

"I now give you," answered he, "in my niece's name and my own, yours, my dear madam, for the 24th of this month."

"Are you in earnest, dear uncle?" cried Geraldine.

"I do not advise him," said Mrs. Neville, laughing, "to be otherwise, after what he has just declared! He might depend upon seeing me here on the night of the 24th with a band of fiddlers, and half the county in my train, ready to dance to the music I had provided, and determined to make a consumption of the whole contents of his larder and cellar!"

"Do not suspect me," resumed he, "of any design to retract; but though I dispense with your taking upon yourself the trouble of furnishing the fiddlers, yet I most readily sanction all your exertions to enlist beaux into the service. I fear they are a species of animal of which a woful dearth will be found in this neighbourhood."

"Be assured of my most active co-operation. I know that the commodity in question is of rare attainment in every

county; but I never yet was at a ball where there were not more light-heeled, and light-witted coxcombs, than could have been tolerated any where else."

Her young companion, who seemed much interested by this conversation, now said,

"We know of *two* gentlemen who are coming down into this neighbourhood next week, and who are both very good dancers."

"Your brother, I conclude is one," said Mrs. Neville; "but who is the other?"

"Colonel Courtville. Don't you remember hearing his sister, Mrs. Everley, say, that she was in hourly expectation of seeing him at Oakley Lodge?"

"No, really; I neither retain names nor circumstances so accurately, when an entire stranger to those whom the circumstances concern, and the names belong to!"

"Colonel Courtville is *not* an entire stranger to me," resumed Lady Elizabeth, a little piqued; "I have met him at several houses in town."

" And is he agreeable?"

" I don't know; I never conversed with him."

" Is he not, however, remarkably handsome?" inquired my mother, glad to have, at last, thought of any thing to say to our uninteresting visitor; " Mrs. Everley has a picture of him which gives that idea very strongly."

" Yes," replied Lady Elizabeth; " he is extremely handsome."

This assent, unsupported by any subsequent observation, terminated the little dialogue my mother had so civilly begun. A new subject, she found, was to be started; and she was too indolent to seek for one.

Mrs. Neville, now taking up a book from amongst several others that were scattered upon a small table near her, carelessly opened it, saying, " This must be a little French volume, by its bright pink cover! O, my old favourite, *Adele de Senange!*— Dear Miss Fauconberg, why do you not have it bound?"

" It does not belong to me," said Gerald-

ine; "I borrowed it yesterday of a lady in the neighbourhood."

"Have you never read it?"

"I have never even opened it!"

"Then, believe me, you have a very great pleasure to come. It is elegantly written, and extremely interesting throughout; but there is in it one passage so peculiarly sweet, so innocently tender, that every feeling heart must be affected by it. I will not tell you what the sentence is to which I allude; but, when you read the book, I am sure you will be struck by it."

"And should I, do you think," said Ferdinand, smiling, "be equally successful in discovering its merits?"

"I don't know; look at it, however. You men, wise as you would be thought, are not above beguiling the tedious hours with a little sentimental nonsense. I have seen many of you read the silliest, the most insipid tales, with as much gravity and attention as would have served to solve a problem."

"I assure you," cried my mother, "that

is not the case with Ferdinand, who, generally speaking, dislikes novels."

"The truth is," said he, "the heroines of romance are described as beings so bewitchingly amiable, that they put me out of humour with women in real life; and the heroes are so perfect, that they fill me with a mortifying sense of my own inferiority."

"I differ from you entirely," cried Mrs. Neville. "One of the strongest objections that might be urged against novels is, the passionate, impatient, and over-bearing character assigned to most of the lovers. The authors tell you a prodigious deal of their generosity, courage, and enthusiastic sensibility; but many of them are so quarrelsome, have so little self-command, or are so blindly and furiously jealous, that one might live as securely and as peaceably with a half-intoxicated savage! The perfect heroes you describe were formerly, I allow, in fashion; but you read of no Sir Charles Grandisons now: the present *ton* among that class of imaginary persons, particularly in foreign publications,

is rashness, selfishness, and a sort of mad irritability, for which any actually-existing creature would deserve to be shut up in a dark room, and fed upon bread and water!"

"There is so much justice in this criticism," said Madame de St. Hermine, "that good temper, one of the first requisites to happiness in social life, and fortitude to endure evil, one of the noblest virtues of the human mind, seem to be totally put out of the question, in the enumeration of a hero's merits."

"What has most provoked me," cried Geraldine, "in the very limited number of these sort of books which I have been permitted to read is, the intuitive and supernatural genius, for all kinds of accomplishments, attributed to the heroines. Brought up, many of them, in profound retirement, often poor and dependent, they acquire, nobody knows how, a skill in languages, in music, in dancing and drawing, such as we have often found, to our sorrow, the most assiduous application, under the direction

of the best masters, will not enable us to attain. And these self-educated ladies are always described as out-soaring every girl of real fashion, who ventures to vie with them in talent and cultivation."

"I hold these vulgar exaggerations in such profound contempt," cried Mrs. Neville, "that, were the innate endowments they record credible, I would rather forfeit the chance of ever hearing another note of music, or of ever again beholding another picture, than be condemned to listen to, or look at, the effects produced by them.—But, "something too much of this*." Suppose, now, we go and look at your conservatory, Mr. Archer; I hear it is a delightful one."

We all attended her to the garden, from whence we led her to the side of the river; showed her the pleasure-boat; pointed out to her some of our favourite seats; invited her to try her skill in shooting at our target; and then accompanied her back to

* Hamlet.

the house, where, after taking some refreshment, she rung for her carriage, saying,

"My poor little greys must pay for the treat I have been enjoying; I shall make them trot home with their best speed, for I expect company, and shall scarcely have time to dress for dinner."

As Lesmore walked with her to the door, whither we likewise escorted her to look at her greys and her curricle, she said to him,

"I hope next week to have the pleasure of seeing you to dinner, Mr. Lesmore; I shall then have a gentlemen at my house, the brother of Lady Elizabeth, who may relieve you from the fear of encountering a mere party of females."

"He is used to that," cried Madame de St. Hermine. "We have him in such good training that you need not apprehend his proving refractory."

"But you will allow me to suppose, my dear madam, his good behaviour in such society depends a little upon the attractions he may find in it."

She then mounted her light and airy car, Lady Elizabeth stepped in after her, and they drove out of sight with almost alarming rapidity.

The first sentence which, in the warmth of her heart, Geraldine uttered as we turned from the door, was,

"She is a most delightful creature!"

"She is, indeed," cried Mr. Archer. "I was charmed with her the moment I saw her at Sir James Charleburg's. She unites to an appearance of high fashion, a very beautiful face and figure; and to the most unaffected vivacity, a great deal of good sense and observation. How long have you known her, Lesmore? and how, in the d——l's name! have you escaped falling in love with her?"

This trying question, whatever might be its effects upon the cheeks of Ferdinand, made mine tingle so sensibly, that I turned away to avoid being observed. The countenance of Geraldine, however, caught my eye, an instant, as I passed her: a smile so arch played about her mouth, and there

was so much meaning in her downcast face, that had I been compelled to interpret to her uncle all it expressed, very few doubts would have remained to him of Lesmore's sensibility to the attractions of Mrs. Neville.

I heard but indistinctly the answer he made to the plain interrogatory that had been addressed to him; by the tone of his voice, however, I discovered it to be uttered in raillery; and Mr. Archer, laughing, quitted him, and went into his study.

I must now close this long letter, my dear Augusta, or it will be too bulky for a frank. Let me only add, that the ball, solicited by Mrs. Neville, is really determined upon; and that, though Mr. Archer permits that lady to imagine it is granted at her request, Madame de St. Hermine tells me, he had it in contemplation from the moment he learnt the disinterested renunciation made by dear Geraldine in my favour on the night she was to have gone to Sir James Charleburg's. Ferdinand, you may believe, is invited to prolong his stay

here on this occasion. My mother, however, leaves us in a few days to establish herself for the rest of the year at Parkton Castle; but consents to my remaining with my friend till October. I hope at that period, my dear sister, you will pay us your promised visit; my mother herself, though extremely impatient to see both you and your little girl, is so good as not to wish for your arrival till I am at home. Ferdinand will be with her part of the time I shall be absent; and during the remainder, she will amuse herself with superintending the progress of her new dairy.

We have sometimes been praised for our accommodating and easy tempers. Do you not think with me, that whatever merit may be imputed to us on that account, we derive by inheritance from our mild and indulgent mother? Who could be captious or unreasonable that had been brought up under the eye of such a parent!

Adieu, my dear Augusta. Yours, with true affection,

JULIA LESMORE.

LETTER XIV.

MISS LESMORE TO THE SAME.

Sept. 14.

ALL our fine weather, my dear Augusta, has forsaken us; and for these last two days we have been confined to the house by almost incessant rains, without seeing a single creature. Do not, however, suppose I mean to complain of dulness. We seem all to be provided with spirits more than sufficient to counteract the benumbing influence of gloomy weather. Madame de St. Hermine arranges and classes the botanical plants she has employed the summer in drying and collecting. My mother toils like another Penelope at her cross-stitch; Mr. Archer avails himself of the involuntary reprieve he is obliged to give the partridges, in order to examine some old accounts his steward has vainly plagued him to look at this month past. Geraldine

paints whilst I practise the harp, or plays and sings herself whilst I, with the worst memory in the world, puzzle myself over an Italian verb. Ferdinand spends two or three hours in his own apartment after breakfast, and draws or reads. But at two o'clock the scene changes; we all become sociable, and meet in the library, to eat fruit and brown bread; inquire after each other's proceedings of the morning; comment upon the weddings or stories of murder in the newspaper, and romp with the dogs; then, while Mr. Archer and my brother go to the billiard-room, Geraldine and I repair to the hall, and play at battledore and shuttlecock. The exclamation of "O dear, I wish it would be fine!" does not proceed from any of our lips oftener than once in four and twenty hours.

I had nearly, however, by my own flippancy, deprived myself of the resource which battledore and shuttlecock afford. Yesterday, whilst Geraldine and I were engaged at this favourite game, Lesmore, who was waiting to begin playing at billiards

till a man went away who had just called upon Mr. Archer on business, stood looking at us in the hall nearly a quarter of an hour. In the evening, happening to pass the little table at which he usually sits and draws, I took a peep over his shoulder at what he was doing, and before he could be aware of my vicinity, beheld a very graceful female figure, which, though but slightly sketched in chalks, represented the exact attitude, dress, and form of Geraldine, such as he had seen her in the morning whilst observing her in the hall. I leant gently forward, and said in a low voice,

"Give *me* that drawing, Ferdinand; I shall value it much more than you will."

He started on finding me so near him, but answered with perfect good humour, "You possess already an ample share of the original's favour. I have nothing but this inanimate resemblance of her: let me, at least, retain that."

I was pleased with this reply, and, patting his shoulder, returned to my seat.

But when we went up for the night, I

could not forbear telling Geraldine what I had seen. She laughed, coloured a little, said it was very flattering to her to find Mr. Lesmore thought her figure worth designing; and wishing me good night, went to her own room.

Thus far all was very well: but this morning, when at the usual hour she asked me again to play, I pertly enough rallied her upon the subject of the drawing, and told her she wanted to furnish attitudes for another.

"O Julia! what an opinion you must have of my vanity! You make me almost determine never to play again."

Saying this, she actually passed me with the intention, I believe, of going back to the dressing-room; but I flew after her, and partly by entreaties, partly by remonstrances, prevailed upon her to return. Ferdinand never approached us, and our game was disturbed by no intruding observers.

The French novel Mrs. Neville so strongly recommended to our perusal, has been a

great resource to us these last two evenings. Madame de St. Hermine, who reads her native language so admirably, and Geraldine, who, from the long habit of associating with her, performs that difficult task equally well, take it by turns to be our public lecturers. We sit in a little group near the fire (for since these rains we have fires in the evening), and

———————" forget all time
" All seasons, and their change."

My mother and Mr. Archer, at a separate table, play a quiet game at piquet; but, now and then, listen to what is going forward, make some little observation, and take no inconsiderable degree of interest in the story.

We proceeded through several letters which, however entertaining and well written, appeared not to contain any passage worthy the high praise we had heard from Mrs. Neville, when Geraldine, who had the book in her hand, and, during an

interruption made by Mr. Archer, had suffered her eye to glance forward, hastily cried out,

"O this must be the part Mrs. Neville alluded to!"

She then went on reading an account of the accidental discovery of some benevolent action performed by the hero of the tale, and which his mistress gently reproaches him for not having revealed sooner. "*Il falloit,*" *dit-elle,* "*nous mettre dans votre confidence; nous aurions partagé votre bonne action.*"—"*Ne me réprochez pas mon silence; il-y-a une sorte d'embarras à parler du peu de bien qu'on peut faire.*"—"*Pourquoi?*" *demandat-elle, vivement,* "*Moi, j'en ferois exprès pour vous le dire**!"

The unpremeditated tenderness and exquisite simplicity of this last speech, drew

* "You ought," said she, "to have admitted us into your confidence; we would have shared in your charitable action."—"Do not reproach me for my silence.—It is embarrassing to speak of the little good we may do."—"Why so?" demanded she, with vivacity, "I would do good expressly to tell you of it!"

from every mouth an exclamation of delight.

"How is the man to be envied," cried Ferdinand with warmth, "to whom words, artlessly implying such devoted affection, could be addressed!"

"But what a delicious motive for doing good!" said Geraldine. "Of all human incitements, that of giving pleasure to those we love seems to me the highest!"

"Retain, and ever cherish this social and disinterested sentiment!" cried Madame de St. Hermine, regarding her with the kindest approbation; "I love to discover in my Geraldine feelings so generous and so friendly!"

I stole a side-long glance at Lesmore during this speech, and, to say the truth, observed that he seemed to love her quite as well! Leaning upon one arm, his port-crayon suspended over his drawing, and his dark eyes rivetted upon the animated countenance of Geraldine, he appeared to contemplate her with affection, softness, and complacency. Since he has been here, I

have never seen his liberal and feeling mind shine forth in his looks so strongly! How much I wished, at that moment, to have possessed the power of directing towards him the attention of the lovely object of his meditations! But she dreamt not of having attracted his notice; never turned her eyes towards the place where he sat; and in a few minutes again resumed her book.

Ah, Ferdinand! how continually when I reflect upon the tardy change in your opinion of this most amiable girl, do these words of Shakespeare occur to my recollection,

> " What our contempts do often hurl from us,
> " We wish it ours again!"——ANT. & CLEOP.

Sept. 15.

MY mother left us this morning, more warmly prepossessed than ever in favour of our dear Geraldine, whose attention to her, during her whole visit, has been unremitting and affectionate.

The sun again peeps forth; our walks, though not to such a distance from home, have been resumed; the slaughter of the poor partridges, by our two gentlemen, has again commenced; visitors once more find their way to the house; and the day after to-morrow Mrs. Neville dines here, with a large party of Everleys and Charleburgs.

Sept. 16.

I HAVE again seen the young woman of whom I mentioned having had a glimpse at the farm-house we passed during our last early ride. She was at church this morning, in company with an elderly man, who, I imagine, is her father. In walking to our pew, some little impediment obliged us to stop for a moment, and my eyes accidentally rested upon this girl. She is, as I sagaciously suspected, extremely pretty, and has a look of perfect modesty; but I did not instantly recollect her, and perhaps might not have done so at all, had not a bright blush, and a half-pleased, half-bashful

glance which she cast towards Ferdinand, who was walking next me, recalled the former interview, if it may be so termed, to my remembrance. The change in the young woman's countenance escaped not, I fear, the observation of Geraldine, who, as well as myself, was at that moment regarding her. She moved forward, however, as soon as the path-way was cleared, without turning her head; but I could not forbear looking round at my brother, upon whose face I perceived the traces of a recent and very friendly smile. What can be the circumstances attending his knowledge of this girl? Why does she blush on seeing him? And why each time I have beheld her, has he, though evidently aware of my curiosity concerning her, observed so total a silence upon the subject? Time, perhaps, may explain all this mystery: meanwhile, I have only to wish Geraldine had not witnessed the sort of intelligence that seems to subsist between them. She has said nothing to me, however, in relation to the

business, and perhaps has already forgotten it.

Sept. 18.

OUR company staid late yesterday, and, when they went, I was too sleepy and tired to take up the pen.

Mr. and Mrs. Everley brought with them, by previous permission, solicited in the morning, the brother of the latter, Colonel Courtville. He is now quartered at N——, but spends much of his time at Oakley Lodge. Though by no means so handsome at eight and twenty or thirty, as his picture represents him to have been at sixteen, he is still eminently distinguished for personal appearance: but he is a thorough coxcomb, and rather of the old-fashioned school. In his looks and voice there is a studied sentimentality, a dying softness, that renders it difficult and embarrassing to encounter his eye. He seems making love to every lady he addresses; and I suspect is by no means backward in attributing to the

irresistible force of his own attractions, the confusion his languishing glances often occasion.

The other individuals of our party were Mrs. Neville, her two guests, Lady Elizabeth and Lady Catherine Neville, Sir James Charlebury, and his son and daughter. The three latter are, in all respects, by far the most disagreeable people I have become acquainted with in this neighbourhood. Sir James obtained his present title and estate, as heir-at-law to the last possessor, to whom he was personally an utter stranger. What his habits and pursuits might be previous to this elevation, I will not pretend to determine; there is every reason, however, to conclude, by his very evident want of education, and the prodigious consequence he now assumes, that they were not such as he would, at this time, be proud to acknowledge.

The son is a pedantic, awkward, college student; vociferous, presuming, and, to me, intolerable. Miss Charlebury, with a pretty figure, but an unmeaning, sallow, plain

countenance, affects the coquettish airs of a beauty; practises a thousand hackneyed tricks to obtain notice; and conveys, in her manners towards women, much of the forward familiarity with which she seeks to gain attention from the men. She has received an expensive education; dances well, but affectedly; sings, plays the piano-forte, and, as her father took care to inform us, the lute, the lyre, the Spanish guitar, and the pedal harp! She chose always to address Madame de St. Hermine in French, though that lady speaks English with the greatest facility, and with less foreign accent than any of her countrywomen I ever heard. Miss Charlebury likewise found opportunity to acquaint us with her proficiency in the Italian language; talked fluently of Tasso, Petrarch, and Dante; said she was now studying Spanish and German; and, in short, did every thing that in one visit *could* be done, towards inspiring us with boundless veneration for her immense acquirements.

Previous to this, however, it was her fa-

ther's turn to display his importance. In a manner scarcely veiled even by the flimsiest covering of delicacy or good manners, he made perpetual comparisons between the merits of his own and Mr. Archer's cook; sipped and tasted the wine with the smack of a *connoisseur*; asked how long Mr. Archer had had it? what vintage it was of? whether he remembered the port, claret, or Madeira he had drank when last at Charlebury Hall? told what each pipe cost him; repeated the favourable observations upon it of sundry lords and baronets; informed us what the average weight of his pine apples had been the last two seasons, and recommended to his host a new method of managing his hot-house, acknowledging it was expensive, but pompously adding,

"Every thing *must* be expensive if you seek for perfection; and I fairly confess that it always puts me out of humour to see at my own table a merely moderate thing of any kind. Fruit, for instance, which I myself seldom touch, I am so particularly nice about, that I always gather it with my

own hand. Pray, Mrs. Neville, send up that dish of grapes; they appear to me to be some of the same sort I lately sent as a present to my Lord ——. He tasted them at Charlebury Hall, and declared they were the finest he ever met with; considerably better than any he had at either of his seats. So, I sent him a handsome basket of them, and Arabella wrote a polite note, accompanied with the words and music of a Spanish song, which my lord heard her sing to her guitar, and which, we thought, might be acceptable to Lady Georgiana, his daughter."

After this, he examined the grapes with profound gravity, bunch by bunch, and ended with candidly acknowledging, that though these were certainly very fine, he had scarcely any but what were heavier, and bore larger fruit.

"But there is," continued he, by way of consolation, "a great deal of luck in all these things. I happen to have one of the very best gardeners in England; the aspect of my hot-house is perfection; I spare no

cost to have every thing as good as the climate will allow; and, somehow or other, I am so fortunate as to succeed beyond even my own most sanguine expectations."

Mr. Archer bore all this parade of superiority with exemplary composure and indifference. Mrs. Neville talked to her two neighbours, Mr. Everley and my brother; Colonel Courtville, in a low voice, addressed to me a great deal of insignificant small-talk; his sister looked weary; the Lady Nevilles surveyed the boasting baronet with grave conte Geraldine, suppressing a smile, stol w and then, an expressive look at t lf-yawning Madame de St. Hermine; M. Charlebury occasionally chimed in with his insufferable father; and his sister entered into a voluble detail, intended for the joint edification of the Colonel and myself, of the immense trouble she took, when in town last year, to procure a pit-box at the opera, the only part of the house, she added, in which her friend Lady L. who was to be partner with her in the subscription, would ever sit.

At length this repast, which, to me, proved the dullest, and appeared by far the longest I ever made at Highgrove Park, concluded. Geraldine retired with the ladies, and left Mr. Archer to the enjoyment of all Sir James's self-satisfied grandeur.

It was now too late and dusky to propose a general stroll in the garden, although the air was mild and serene. Mrs. Neville, however, scrupled not to encounter the dews of evening, and asked Mrs. Everley if she would [illegible]e to accompany her. She readily cons[illegible]; at her desire I joined the party; and [illegible]ing on our shawls, we sallied forth.

The moment she thought herself fairly out of hearing—" Oh heavens !" exclaimed Mrs. Neville, " what a disgusting torrent of arrogant impertinence are we at length released from ! Do not be angry with me, Miss Lesmore; but I shall die if I do not give vent to some of my spite against that odious Sir James !"

" O pray," said I, laughing, " make no

stranger of me! I have not the least desire to become his champion."

"No, you cannot have so bad a taste: but I thought you might internally accuse me of flippancy and indiscretion for avowing my opinion of him so openly. I will tell you a secret, my dear Miss Lesmore: I am half afraid of you; and as the sensation is by no means pleasant, it has sometimes been accompanied by a determination to dislike you. Before I finally resolve upon so desperate an expedient, tell me whether it is quite impossible to soften your heart, and gain humble admittance into some one of its little unoccupied recesses?"

The irresistible frankness and good-humour of this speech quite disarmed me, and thawed all the frostiness of my disposition towards her. I drew her arm within my own, and holding her hand as we pursued our walk, said, "No, dear Mrs. Neville, do not threaten to dislike me, since the oftener I see you, and the more I know you, the worse I could endure the fulfilment of such a menace."

" Shall we then sign a treaty of amity? You know not the pride and pleasure it would give me to be in favour with the chosen friend of Geraldine Fauconberg."

" Who could fail," cried I, " being in the highest possible favour with me, who does justice to the merit of one I so affectionately love?"

" I wonder not at your attachment to her. She is indeed a sweet creature. Mrs. Everley can tell you how enthusiastically I spoke of her after the very first interview; and every succeeding one confirms my partiality. In her aspect, manners, voice, there is something bewitchingly attractive; her countenance, youthful and gentle as it is, has yet an air of high breeding, that gives it unusual dignity; all she says is accompanied with an easy propriety, a sort of temperated animation, that gives value and interest to the slightest expression. Were I in sorrow, I think nothing would sooth me more than to hear her speak to, and see her regard me with pity; and yet I am not fond of pity, I assure you: from half the

world it comes in " such a questionable shape," it might be mistaken for insult."

Praise so just, and so cordially delivered, of my beloved Geraldine, filled my eyes with tears of gratitude and pleasure. I pressed Mrs. Neville's hand as it still rested upon my arm, and said—

" Geraldine already admires you with the same liberal spirit you extol her; and henceforward I shall be truly ambitious to cultivate the friendship you are so good as to offer me."

" You are, I believe, a very amiable and warm-hearted girl;" cried she, apparently much pleased, " and if you promise to cast upon me no more petrifying and frigid looks, I very readily promise to love you with the sincerest affection."

Then addressing Mrs. Everley, " Tell me, my dear madam, why do all the good people in this neighbourhood submit to be annoyed by the vulgar ostentation of those mushroom Charleburys?"

" I am quite unable to answer such a question. They were established in the

county before I came to it, and are probably endured on account of their wealth and their good dinners."

"Wealth! I despise it, when disgraced by pride and ignorance! Good dinners! what dinners could be such, that were poisoned by barefaced insolence, coarse exultation, and inhospitable pomposity!"

"All this is very fine," said Mrs. Everley, laughing; "but be assured, that if even such a man as Mr. Archer, possessed of affluence and independence, as well as of taste to disdain such society, thinks it worth while, by a little occasional civility, to avoid making an enemy of a powerful neighbour, others would find it but a dangerous experiment to adopt a system of over-refined delicacy. Sir James, when offended, is extremely litigious and inveterate; and would readily expend upon a law-suit, to distress and molest an enemy, as much as he would upon show and parade, to mortify or outvie a competitor."

"Hateful wretch! Yet every county, every city, every village, contains an evil-

genius, a scourge of this malignant description! Nay, too often, in private families, you find individuals whose tormenting tempers, and overbearing arrogance, make life a burthen to all who are placed within their reach. *I* have never known the happiness which filial or sisterly affection may impart; but I have observed, that even that may be imbittered by the pestilential vapours of selfishness, and the perverse discontents of caprice."

The sound of music at a distance here interrupted our conversation. We listened with attention, and I soon distinguished the clear, mellow, and grateful voice of Geraldine, accompanied by the drawing-room piano-forte. The upper part of the sashes were drawn down, though the room was now lighted up; and the night was so perfectly calm and still, that we scarcely lost a single note. Gradually and quietly we approached nearer to the house, and stopping within a few paces of the windows, which are almost level with the lawn, we

stood, lost in shadow, listening to the conclusion of the song, and looking at the company within. The gentlemen were not yet come out of the dining-parlour; but near the instrument sat Miss Charlebury, nodding her head to mark the time. In separate parts of the room, leaning back in arm-chairs, and stretching forth their long limbs to their utmost extent, sat the ladies Elizabeth and Catherine Neville, appearing wholly uninterested in what was going forward, drowsy and vacant. Madame de St. Hermine had, for a time, left the room, probably wearied of a trio which poor Geraldine was under the necessity of endeavouring to entertain.

As soon as her air concluded, she arose, and resigned her place to Miss Charlebury, saying, "I am now authorized to ask for the pleasure of hearing you, since your declaration that you would not be the first to sing, I hope implied that you would not refuse to be the second."

"O, pray do not urge me just now! My

voice would sound shockingly so soon after yours! Let me only play to you at present."

"You shall do exactly as you please;" said Geraldine, "but tell me what music I shall look out for you."

"The conceited animal," said Mrs. Neville, in a low voice, "defers singing till she can have an audience of men to admire her!"

"I have myself heard her perform," observed Mrs. Everley, "and am greatly mistaken if she wins applause from any of the gentlemen it may be her aim to enchant to-night."

During these remarks, the accomplished Arabella was turning over, making difficulties, and finding a variety of objections against every composition the patient and good-humoured Geraldine put before her; and, at last, it became so evident that she was determined to avoid playing at all during the absence of the male part of the company, that the point was given up; and soon after we went in, to afford Ge-

raldine what relief we could from so irksome a situation.

Then it was that Miss Charlebury regaled us with the notable detail I before mentioned of her own marvellous instruction and indefatigable application. Mrs. Everley and I tried to listen with as much civility as Geraldine; but Mrs. Neville made not even the attempt: she seated herself apart, upon a low sofa, drew towards her a small table and a light, and with perfect composure begun reading a new review.

On the re-appearance of Madame de St. Hermine tea was ordered, and, very soon after, Mr. Archer and his guests came in.

Ferdinand entered last, and Mrs. Neville, singling him out, offered him a place next her. Colonel Courtville drew a chair between Geraldine and me, saying, as he seated himself, "I thought, not long since, that I heard the sound of music, stealing

—— o'er my ear like the sweet south
That breathes upon a bank of violets.

"Who was the fair harmonist? and why

have her syren strains so speedily ceased?"

Geraldine smiled, and quietly answered, "I was singing in hopes the example would be followed by Miss Charlebury; but I have not yet succeeded in prevailing upon her to let me hear her."

"O, that's very bad, Arabella," cried Sir James, catching the sound of his daughter's name, and therefore listening to the sequel of the speech, "that's very bad indeed! You must give us a song; I'll take no denial; you positively must sing, and play us a sonata too!"

"Well, papa, when we have done tea, if you desire it, I will."

"That's right, that's right. I have no notion of letting people hide their talents in a napkin. You have particular reason, child, to rejoice that nature has given you such powers; for if she had been a niggard to you of those, it is not all the expense I have lavished upon masters that would have enabled you to accomplish what you now do."

Several remonstrances in a similar strain,

addressed to his daughter, but intended to impress upon our minds a due respect for *her* abilities and *his* magnificent spirit, passed during tea; and as soon as it was over, the now tractable and obliging young lady was led to the instrument.

My expectations were not high, and in some respects she far surpassed them. She appears to be a pretty good musician, and her execution is brilliant, but her voice is harsh and vulgar-toned; her expression exaggerated, and her *bravura* passages shrill and desperate.

This first specimen of her *savoir-faire* was crowned with sufficient applause to induce her, without hesitation, to proceed to an instrumental piece; and with incredible rapidity she dashed and rattled through an extremely difficult concerto, to the joy and exultation of her father, and the amazement and distraction of every body else!

These two successive performances would have amply satisfied the company; but we were not to be let off upon such easy terms. As soon as the poor piano-forte had received

its final *thump*—for she really struck it with the strong hand of a boxer—her father called upon her to play something upon the harp. I trembled for my beloved instrument, but concealed my fears, and suffered Colonel Courtville to bring it from the little quiet recess where it had hitherto been secured from molestation.

After tuning a few notes, and actually placing her hands upon the strings, Miss Charlebury seemed suddenly to recollect herself, and called out, "Papa, do you know Miss Lesmore plays the harp? And, I dare say, a vast deal better than I do: I wish she would take my place."

"Does she, my dear," said Sir James, coolly. "Well, I am sure, we shall all be very glad to hear her: but do, child, give us first the favourite air and variations Lord —— so much admires. You can remember it, I have no doubt."

The fair Arabella made no further opposition; and probably, had her lute, her lyre, and her Spanish guitar been attainable, would, with equal readiness, when

the air and variations ended, have treated us with samples of her skill upon each. Luckily, however, this was not practicable, and no one pressing her to renew her exertions upon either of the instruments she had already tried, she was most civilly thanked for the entertainment she had afforded, and a cessation at length ensued; for, tired of the very idea of music, neither Geraldine nor I would take the place she resigned. Sir James condescendingly said, he hoped I would, on some future occasion, allow him the pleasure of hearing me: and added, "Young ladies are apt to take fright on hearing another perform a very difficult composition; but I dare say, Miss Lesmore, you had no reason for doing so. Besides, I assure you, Arabella by no means played her best to night: she is not at all in good practice; for, what with our ball, what with visits we have been making, and company we have had at home, she has found little or no time for her musical studies. By the way, Mr. Archer, *you* are going to give a ball, it seems. Faith, I am

glad my example takes so well! And now I think of it, your having a thing of this kind just now, may enable me to be of some little use to you. I had all my coloured lamps, and various other decorations from town: they are not yet sent back, nor, indeed, to say the truth, do I think it will be worth my while to return them at all. If *I* make no future use of them, my friends may; their cost is a matter of no consequence to me: and if they can be of any use to you, they are much at your service."

"Thank you, Sir James," said Mr. Archer; "if we want them we will apply to you: but I don't think my niece is very fond of coloured lamps; and this is to be *her* ball."

"They are the most odious things in the world!" cried Mrs. Neville. "I always think, when I see them, of a lion and a unicorn, a shapeless crown, and a vulgar transparency, on a birth-night, over a shoemaker's shop!"

"And did they bring all these things to your remembrance, madam," said Sir James,

much piqued, "the evening you honoured my house with your presence?"

"I really do not recollect; I never was so stupid at a ball in my life."

Sir James seemed to be considering what answer, at once decently civil and comfortably spiteful, he should make to this speech. Time, however, was not allowed him to settle the point; for Geraldine, to give a different direction to his thoughts, proposed a pool of commerce, to which most of the party present consented.

The Charleburys were the first who departed, their house being the most distant, and the road to it so bad, part of the way, that the horses are obliged to proceed upon it at a mere foot-pace.

The short time spent with us afterwards by the rest of the company was extremely pleasant. Mrs. Neville inquired whether we had read *Adele de Sénange*, and discovered her favourite passage? She was much gratified to find we coincided in opinion with her so well; showed the utmost kindness and attention to Geraldine; im-

proved her acquaintance with the elegant Madame de St. Hermine; and, as the moment drew near for ordering her carriage, said, " Before I go, my dear Miss Fauconberg, will you consent to give me one little simple air; a Venetian ballad, for instance, or any thing else you like better, by way of *sweetening my mouth*, after the nausea occasioned by the loud and coarse screaming of the accomplished Arabella?"

We all joined in this request, and Geraldine, laughing at the strange manner in which it was made, complied without difficulty. She sung one of Millico's well-known canzonets with such taste and feeling, that Mrs. Neville, quite enchanted, kissed her cheek when she arose, and, in the following quotation from an elegant Italian poet, at once applauded and thanked her:—

" Nè decider lieve fia
" Alla debil mente mia
" Se facesse in me più incanto
" Il tuo volto, od il tuo canto."

Geraldine could not be insensible to

praise so flattering, proceeding from the lips of a woman she so greatly admires. Ferdinand's eyes sparkled with undissembled pleasure; and Mr. Everley seizing the opportunity for a poetical *impromptu*, the idea of which, however, was furnished by the Italian author, addressed the fair musician in these lines—

Judgement suspended holds our choice
Where nature's partial bounty show'rs
Such gifts of beauty, charms of voice,
As beggar our descriptive pow'rs:—
If love the pref'rence gives to grace,
Taste claims for song the noblest place!

This little extemporary production met with all the applause its unstudied readiness deserved. Mrs. Neville appointed its author poet in ordinary to the female part of the company present; desired, very speedily, to see some composition addressed to herself; and then, perceiving that Mrs. Everley was preparing to depart, took the hint, and rung for her own carriage.

Thus, my dear Augusta, by means of an immoderately long letter, have I brought

you to the conclusion of our dinner-party. May you, in reading it, experience less weariness than, during some portion of the day, I endured myself. Adieu.

Ever affectionately yours,

JULIA LESMORE.

LETTER XV.

FERDINAND LESMORE, ESQ. TO THE REV. ARCHIBALD NEWENDEN.

Highgrove Park,
Sept. 19.

My dear Sir,

THE day approaches which I had fixed upon for beginning my journey from hence to your house. Instead of your expected pupil, however, you will receive this letter; and, I flatter myself, experience some disappointment at the substitution. A request from Mr. Archer to prolong my stay, on an occasion I could not easily decline, must account to you for this change in my plans. But how shall I account for my late silence, or for the concise and unsatisfactory tenour of my last letter? Believe me, it has been my wish to confide in you as unreservedly as at any period of my life: but a weak and unworthy sentiment of false shame; reluctance to acknowledge a past error; these

have been the hitherto insurmountable obstacles to my accustomed sincerity. I have, at length, determined to conquer such irrational pride, and to open to you my whole heart.

What a change has that wayward heart undergone, since, with such unfounded prejudice and asperity, I declaimed against the alliance projected for me by my family! Let me frankly own it, my respected friend; in the character and manners of the lady who was destined for me, I have discovered, too late, perhaps, for my happiness, all that in the most visionary and romantic moments of my life, I ever pictured to my imagination of good, generous, feeling, and sincere!—an understanding refined, but not enervated, by cultivation; a sagacity tempered with indulgence; a strength of mind blended with softness and modesty; an ingenuousness the most bewitching, and a temper of such cheerful equanimity, such conciliating gentleness, that where she did not find content, she would produce it! —To the period when I presumptuously

slighted such a creature, I now look back with the profoundest amazement, almost with incredulity!

To a panegyric so earnest, yet so just, all I have to add will give you pain. It will grieve you to hear that I have rendered myself to this most amiable girl an object, if not of dislike, at least of fixed and total indifference. At first, my own repulsive manners disconcerted, and, I am ashamed to add, intimidated her; but from the moment she overcame sensations so arrogantly excited, and resumed her wonted ease and composure, she ceased entirely to think of me. I have nothing to complain of, though so much to lament; since, on no occasion, did she ever cast upon me an ungracious look, or address to me a mortifying expression. The fact is, she does not address me at all! If I am near her, she endures it patiently; for whilst I am silent, she seems not aware of the vicinity. If I speak to her, she answers with mildness and courtesy; but scrupulously avoids saying more than is indispensably necessary, or ever being the

first to begin a conversation. I purposely devise pretences for soliciting little acts of civility from her; such as the loan of a book, the gift of a pencil, and many other trifles, which, in reality, I only wish for or value because they have once been in her possession. These she is ever ready to grant with equal politeness and alacrity; but the boon once bestowed, she is gone before I have even time to thank her! Humbled and depressed by a conduct so dignified, so consistent, yet so uncommon, I lose all courage to attempt engaging her attention; without designing it, she subdues and dispirits me. Every hour, some unsuspected talent, some new proof of the kindness of her affectionate heart, some new grace, rivets the chain by which she so unconsciously binds me. Yet still to her I appear but as a stern and arrogant censor. What a light to be considered in by a lovely young woman, herself all vivacity and animation; in the full tide of health and jocund spirits; caressed and adored by all who approach her; and reared in the

very sun-shine of approving indulgence! Is it matter of wonder, the contrast so striking between what she considers me, and what she has ever been accustomed to behold in those who surround her, that she should conceive of my temper and disposition an opinion the most prejudicial to my future interests?

That my dear, misjudging mother had but foreborn communicating to me the favourite project of her heart! Seeing Miss Fauconberg for the first time, merely as a distant relation, as the friend of my three sisters, and the *elève* of Madame de St. Hermine, I am certain I should have been enchanted by her; but urged, persecuted for many months past to visit this spot, for the sole purpose of beholding the long-cried-up idol of all their hearts; of teaching myself to fall in love with her; of making advances towards a connexion which was at once to unite two estates formerly in the possession of the same proprietor, and two people scarcely less than total strangers to each other; I own that my compliance

was attended with a degree of repugnance amounting almost to disgust; and sickened of the very mention of female accomplishments, detesting the idea of a mere marriage of interest, I came hither prepared to view the wealthy heiress with disapproving eyes, and very little solicitous to render myself to her any other than an object of reciprocal antipathy.

I must acknowledge, likewise, that at the time I am speaking of, Mrs. Neville held a very high place, if not in my heart, at least in my imagination. Indeed, I still think her one of the most agreeable women I know: but the period is passed when, wishing only that some traits in her character were softened, I might, as to a blessing, aspire to the honour of her good opinion. No change in Mrs. Neville could now make me happy in the prospect of a union with her: the change in myself has eradicated all former impressions, and thrown into the hands of Geraldine Fauconberg the sole power of rendering me fortunate or wretched.

I am now come to the conclusion of my

penitential confession. You are the first, my dear ghostly father, to whom pride of heart has permitted me to make it. While Miss Fauconberg continues to manifest towards me an indifference so mortifying, I cannot prevail upon myself to acknowledge my sentiments for her, even to my sister Julia. Madame de St. Hermine, unreserved upon most other topics, has uniformly preserved the strictest silence, when conversing with me, concerning her beautiful pupil. You will not wonder that this should have been still more scrupulously the case with Mr. Archer.

Here let me terminate this letter; assuring you, that my purposed visit, though deferred, is not relinquished. I will write again as soon as I can fix a day for setting out.

Believe me, my dear and honoured friend, your grateful and affectionate

FERDINAND LESMORE.

LETTER XVI.

MISS LESMORE TO MRS. LUMLEY

Highgrove Park,
Sept. 22.

My dear Augusta,

FERDINAND dined yesterday at Mrs. Neville's, to meet Lord Litchmere, the brother of her two guests, with whom he was already well acquainted, and who, this morning, rode over here with one of his sisters, and was introduced to all our party. He appears a very sensible young man; is perfectly well bred, but somewhat formal and reserved. His stay at Westhill will be short, as he is only come to fetch his sisters, who, during their father's absence from home, were permitted to put themselves under the protection of their youthful aunt. The earl is now at his own mansion again; and his daughters only defer their return to him till the ball at this house is over.

Mrs. Neville, the day before my brother dined there, apologized for not including the whole family in her invitation, but gave no reason for the omission.

Preparations are making here for our fête, and much pleasant bustle is going forward. Sir James Charlebury's *coloured lamps* have not been applied for: our chief decorations will consist of flowers and green-house plants. Geraldine and I are already deeply engaged: several officers of Colonel Courtville's regiment, men of family and fashion, are invited; and we anticipate the gaities of the evening with great delight.

Sept. 23.

AT the distance of about seven miles from hence there is a fine stately old mansion, belonging to a nobleman now absent on a tour to the lakes. It contains an excellent collection of pictures; and a party, consisting of Mrs. Neville and her three guests, Mrs. Everley, Colonel Courtville, and ourselves, was formed this morning to

go and see it. Various were the conveyances by which we chose to transport ourselves thither. Mrs. Archer and Madame de St. Hermine preferred being rowed down the river in the pleasure-boat, the house to which we were going being situated within a quarter of a mile of its banks; and Lady Catherine Neville, as well as Mrs. Everley, begged to accompany them. Col. Courtville drove Lord Litchmere in his curricle, and Mrs. Neville took Lady Elizabeth into hers. Geraldine, Lesmore, and I went on horseback.

Those who were upon *terra firma* kept together as much as possible. We were all in excellent spirits, the day was beautiful, and nothing could be more picturesque than some parts of the road we had to pass. Men, women, and children ran to their cottage doors to see the gay cavalcade; and many of the company liberally distributed the contents of their purses amongst the neediest looking of these humble spectators.

At length we reached the spot appointed for our place of general rendezvous; a

shady part of the road, on the edge of the river. Here we alighted to wait for our friends in the boat, ordering the servants to go forward to Lord B——'s house with the carriages and horses: and here, as we were laughing, talking, and sauntering under the trees, a feeble, but heart-rending moan, suddenly struck our ears. We started—all became silent—and with one consent stopped, and cast our inquiring eyes around. In vain, however; we saw nothing but the river on one side the road, the hedge and trees on the other.

"What could that be?" Mrs. Neville at length ventured to say.

"Some unhappy creature in distress," answered Geraldine, in an accent of commiseration.

The moans were at that instant distinctly heard again; and every body now declared that they proceeded from the field on the other side of the hedge."

"Let us call back one of the servants to go and see what it is," said Lady Elizabeth.

"Let us go ourselves!" cried the active and humane Geraldine.

Saying this, she flew to a gate, some way higher up the lane, which opened into the field, and, with the assistance of Ferdinand, who was the first to hasten after her, turning it on its crazy and half-demolished hinges, forced her slender figure through it, and was out of sight in a moment: Lesmore, to save time, let it fall back when she had passed, sprung over it, and disappeared in his turn. Animated by their example, we all proceeded to the same spot; our two remaining gentlemen contrived to fasten the gate securely back, and we advanced, in a body, along the side of the hedge towards the place where we saw Geraldine and my brother standing.

When we joined them, how deplorable a spectacle presented itself to our eyes! Stretched upon the earth at their feet lay an emaciated, bruised, and half-naked negro, apparently bereft of sense, and in the last faint convulsions of expiring misery!

A low, but general exclamation of pity and horror was heard from every mouth.

"Unfortunate creature!" cried Mrs. Neville, "is he dead?"

"No;" answered Geraldine, who, during this time, had taken one of his hands, and tried to discover whether any pulse remained, "he still breathes; he may yet, perhaps, recover. There is a basket of refreshments in one of the curricles; if we had it here, a little wine might revive him."

Ferdinand took the hint, and darted back into the lane, in pursuit of the servants and the basket. No one was provided with a smelling-bottle to hold to the poor wretch: but Geraldine, kneeling beside him, regardless of his squalid and loathsome appearance, alternately chafed his temples and rubbed his hands; and before my brother re-appeared, the languid sufferer half opened his glazed and heavy eyes, and made an ineffectual effort to speak. The joy that shone upon the countenance of Geraldine, on witnessing these signs of re-animation,

is not to be expressed. It redoubled her zeal and anxiety in his behalf; and when Ferdinand brought the little basket of provisions, they mutually exerted themselves to make the famished negro swallow a few drops of the wine it so fortunately contained.

I wish I could describe to you the various expressions that appeared upon the countenances of the rest of the party, whilst standing in a circle round the charitable pair, watching this uncommon scene. Lord Litchmere, more than usually serious, contemplated the transaction with the sort of meditative attention with which, I can imagine, a philosopher would regard a phenomenon in nature. His sister, Lady Elizabeth, looked disgusted and supercilious; Colonel Courtville seemed good-naturedly concerned for the grievous state of the helpless stranger; and Mrs. Neville, always enthusiastic in her feelings, gazed on Geraldine with a species of reverential admiration; watched all her movements with

approving delight; and when, at length, the party from the boat, guided by the sound of our voices entered the field, ran up to Madame de St. Hermine, exclaiming—

"Oh, how touching a lesson of humanity have we been taught! Come, dear madam, and behold, proudly behold, the child of your well-rewarded care, performing, with pious tenderness, the lowest offices of charity and benevolence!"

Madame de St. Hermine, much surprised, hastily advanced, and reached her pupil, just in time to see the grateful negro, now a little revived, fix his dim eyes upon the fair creature to whose exertions he was indebted for returning life, clasp his shrunk hands together, and burst into a passion of tears!

"Who is this poor distressed being?" inquired Mr. Archer, much struck by the apparent fervour of his sensibility.

We told him all we knew upon the subject; and Geraldine rising, and approaching her uncle with an air of irresistible en-

treaty, besought him to give directions for having the poor man removed to some place where he might be sheltered and taken care of.

"Certainly, my love: we will have him put into the boat, which will be the gentlest mode of conveyance, and carried to Highgrove Park. There are rooms over the stables, one of which he may occupy, till we see what is fittest to be done with him."

Geraldine kissed her uncle's hand in token of acknowledgement. Then returning to her reviving charge, she listened and tried to understand the broken account which, in faint accents, and bad English, he was endeavouring to give of himself to Ferdinand.

He came, he said, from one of the West India islands, with an English merchant and his family. When within sight of the British coast, a furious storm arose, and they were wrecked. After keeping himself afloat a considerable time, by dint of swimming, this poor creature had the good

fortune to catch hold of a plank, by which he held fast, till driven with great force against the shore. The waves followed, and threw him out to sea again; and this happened repeatedly: but, at last, he made good his footing upon a ledge of rock, and there remained in security till the morning dawned. All traces of the vessel had by that time disappeared; no boat came in sight; he was destitute of provisions, and so situated, that he could neither, with any prospect of succeeding, attempt climbing higher up the rock, nor descend without meeting inevitable destruction in the ocean. Half dead with fatigue, cold, and hunger, he maintained his dreadful post a whole day and a second night. The following morning, impelled by famine and despair, he resolved upon making one vehement effort to ascend the rock, aware that, if he failed or fell, he could only die, and die he must if he remained. After the most toilsome and perilous struggle, he finally effected his purpose: but the summit of the cliff presented nothing more consolatory to

his view than an almost barren plain, a sort of down, on which a few sheep found a scanty pasturage. He walked slowly on, till evening overtook him, and then reached a wheat field, where he appeased the cravings of hunger with the grain supplied by a few ears of corn. He slept under the shelter of a hedge, and in the morning resumed his weary way. At a cottage which he passed, he begged a little bread; but those to whom he applied were children, who, frightened at his colour and haggard looks, ran away. Soon after, he went up to a farm-house, whence, however, he was driven by a fierce dog, who growled and barked so surlily, he ventured not to remain in his vicinity. Nearly spent with inanition and excessive lassitude, he walked on as long as his feeble remnant of strength would permit him, and at last fell down, quite exhausted, in the field where we found him; and "where," he added, looking at Geraldine and Lesmore, "good angels come and help me!"

This story, related in worse English than

I could repeat it, bore an air of probability, and increased the interest already excited by its friendless hero. Exhausted, however, by the effort of speaking so long, he seemed nearly fainting when he came to its conclusion. Fresh nourishment was administered to him; and, after some time, the plan of removing him to the house where his "good angels" lived, was communicated to him. He humbly and thankfully acquiesced. The servants were called, and we saw him gently conveyed to the water side, and placed upon some hay, procured for the purpose, on the floor of the boat. Mr. Archer gave the necessary orders concerning him, and likewise directed his carriage to be brought, as a substitute for the vehicle with which he was parting.

As soon as we quitted the banks of the river, to begin our walk to the mansion of Lord B——, Geraldine, taking her uncle's arm, outstripped the rest of the party, and left us at liberty to make what comments we pleased on the transaction we had witnessed. Mrs. Neville was eloquent in her

praise, and regretted much that Madame de St. Hermine and Mrs. Everley had missed the sight of such active and useful beneficence.

" Certainly what she did was very good," cried Lady Elizabeth, " but still I would not have had her go so near him, or touch him with so little caution; for, really, a more filthy looking object I never beheld!"

" The greater her merit!" cried Lord Litchmere. " We had sent away the servants; the man appeared at the last gasp. Money in this case would have been of no avail; nothing but immediate personal succour could have saved him; and such was the promptitude and unaffected zeal with which Miss Fauconberg administered it, that I think with you, Mrs. Neville, there never was a more affecting scene!"

This was spoken with an animation I should not have expected from Lord Litchmere, and warmly assented to by Colonel Courtville, who added—

" The lively conversation, and gay countenance of Miss Fauconberg, had not led

me to expect from her so much thought and feeling."

"I begin to be of opinion," cried Mrs. Neville, "that there is no recipe for gaiety, *real* gaiety of heart, equal in efficacy to the one with which nature and education have furnished her—a sincere, practical disdain of selfishness! We see what she is capable of doing in the cause of humanity; how tenderly she sympathizes in the miseries of the lowest of her fellow-beings; yet cheerfulness seems to be the habitual disposition of her well-regulated mind. We think, when beholding her decked in smiles, and sparkling with animation, that no change in that blooming and ingenuous countenance could be to its advantage: see her but in generous sorrow for another's sufferings, and she must forcibly remind all who have ever read it, of that truly beautiful passage in one of Richardson's works, where, speaking of some favourite character, he says, "The features of her lovely face, and the turn of her fine eye, are *cast for pity!*"

The expression is, indeed, singularly de-

scriptive, and was thought by more than one of the party, admirably appropriate to our dear Geraldine: but Madame de St. Hermine, without seeking to undervalue her pupil's merit, besought Mrs. Neville to forbear such zealous encomiums in Miss Fauconberg's presence.

"I do not," she added, "fear her becoming vain; but praise so fervent will distress her, and lead her to apprehend she was too public in her benevolence."

"And would you, my dear madam, from the fear of observation, have her shrink from doing what she thinks right?"

"No, certainly; but I would wish her friends not to remind her of the notice she has attracted. It might, on a future occasion, induce her to hesitate incurring it; or give to her, while performing an act of duty, a conscious and painful sensation, too much allied to the apprehension of being thought singular or ostentatious."

"Ah, no! The general simplicity of her manners will exempt her from all such injurious imputations! But I subscribe im-

plicitly to your recommendations of forbearance; since, for the world, I would not cause her one moment's uneasiness or embarrassment."

We were by this time arrived in sight of the magnificent edifice to which our curiosity had guided us. Mr. Archer and Geraldine were waiting for us beneath a noble portico, and proceeded with us through all the principal apartments.

It was with this as with every great collection of pictures I have seen. To one good, there were ten moderate or unpleasing ones. Upon the whole, however, we were extremely gratified; and after taking, on quitting the house, a hasty survey of the garden and pleasure grounds, we remounted, some their horses, and some their carriages, and went home to a late dinner.

The poor negro, we had the satisfaction of hearing, had arrived safely, a considerable time before our return, and been immediately put to bed. Proper nourishment had since been given to him, and he had fallen into a refreshing and tranquil sleep. I sin-

cerely hope this pitiable object of Geraldine's attentive care will recover and live, to reward and gladden her excellent heart. She is as anxious for his accommodation and good treatment as if he were a friend; and, I doubt not, he will invariably meet with both; for though the servants all think with disgust and aversion of a *Black-a-moor*, they all adore their young mistress, and will strive with each other who shall show him most kindness, for her sake. Ferdinand, in speaking of her to me, calls her "the good Samaritan." But what do you think the wretch says of Lady Elizabeth Neville?

"She is in a very secure and comfortable predicament. She can never be condemned in the next world—for she has no soul!"

Sept. 25.

Our ball is over, my dear Augusta; but in the account I have to give of it, I doubt not I shall make you as angry with Lesmore as I am myself. Before I close this letter, however, I hope to obtain some palliating explanation of his extraordinary pro-

ceedings. At present they are enveloped in mystery, and wear a most unfavourable aspect.

Yesterday evening, about half an hour before the company began to assemble, Madame de St. Hermine, to whom Geraldine and I, when we were ready, went to show ourselves in our dancing dresses, observed that we each wanted, as a *finish* to our appearance, an elegant little nosegay. "I saw to-day in the flower-garden," she added, "several china-rose trees in bloom; let one of the men go and gather what you want."

"They are all so busy," cried Geraldine, "that we had better go ourselves: come, Julia, the moon will light us."

Saying this, she took me by the arm, and we descended into the garden together, helped ourselves to the flowers, and then, finding the air keener than we expected, returned to the house by a shorter way, which led us close to the offices.

The door of the housekeeper's room was open as we passed it, and accidentally look-

ing in, we perceived a young country-woman, in a bonnet and cloak, sitting near the table, and apparently crying. Geraldine observing that there was nobody else in the apartment, except a little boy, who seemed to belong to the stranger, stepped in to inquire what was the matter? I followed her; and when the youthful female raised her head, immediately knew her to be the same pretty girl I had lately seen at church, and once before at the farm-house. She stood up as we approached her, and made an humble courtesy.

"Are you waiting to speak to Mrs. Prescot?" said Geraldine, addressing her with great gentleness.

"No, ma'am, I have seen her already."

"I am afraid you are in some distress. Tell me, would you wish to see Mr. Archer?"

Again the girl court'sied, and, with tears in her eyes, answered—

"No, ma'am, thank you—I only desire to see—to speak three words with Mr. Lesmore. Mrs. Prescot has been so good as

to send up to tell him I am here, and perhaps he will condescend to come down a moment."

As she uttered this last sentence, we heard the approaching step of my brother, who, before we could retreat, entered the room.

He advanced hastily towards his suspicious visitor, saying, with an air of interest and concern, " Why, my poor Mary, what brings you here at this late hour of the evening?"

We waited not to hear Mary's reply, but directed our steps towards the part of the house inhabited by the family.

I hardly knew what to say upon so odd an occurrence; yet, not choosing to leave Geraldine to her own reflections, I at last made some common-place remark upon the girl's neat and modest appearance.

" Poor thing!" said Geraldine, " I fear she has got into some grievous difficulty!"

Madame de St. Hermine at that moment joining us, we changed the subject, put on our flowers, and amused ourselves with

conjecturing who, amongst all those that were invited, was likely to arrive first.

In the midst of this edifying conversation, Ferdinand, with a look of some discomposure, appeared at the door, and, after a few moments' hesitation, stepped up to Geraldine:

"I am under the very painful necessity, Miss Fauconberg," said he, "of denying myself the pleasure of spending the early part of this evening at home, and, consequently, of relinquishing the honour of dancing with you. May I, however, hope, you will make my excuses to Mr. Archer, and extend to me your own forgiveness?"

"And pray, Ferdinand," cried I, more angry than I ever felt with any body in my life, "what is your motive for all this?"

"I cannot be explicit at this moment: I am going upon an affair which requires the utmost dispatch, and have only time to repeat my entreaties for Miss Fauconberg's indulgence, and to assure her that I never made a sacrifice which cost me more."

Geraldine, with great sweetness, expressed

her concern at losing him; most readily accorded the pardon he solicited, and ventured to promise him equal lenity from her uncle.

"I rely much upon your friendly intercession," cried Ferdinand, "and now, adieu, Miss Fauconberg; adieu, Madame de St. Hermine. As for you, Julia, I dare not speak to you till your wrath is a little appeased!"

He then left the room, and left us all three looking at each other with silent amazement! Madame de St. Hermine, who had most reason for surprise and conjecture, expressed a serious apprehension that he was going out to settle some unfortunate dispute. I hesitated whether to undeceive her, by revealing the secret of Mary's visit; but an unconquerable reluctance to speak upon so strange a circumstance withheld me: and Geraldine seemed equally disinclined to reveal what she knew.

It was not very long, now, before a few stragglers began to arrive. I always pity the first comers at a great assembly: they

generally appear disconcerted themselves at being so early; and are very often exactly the sort of people the mistress of the house cares the least about: poor scared-looking souls, doubtful of their own welcome, though invited, and unprovided with a word to say.

Geraldine, however, has so much delicacy and feeling, that she finds the means of putting these kind of folks at their ease almost immediately. Her incomparable monitress has not, I am sure, suffered her to overlook the excellent advice Madame de Sévigné gives upon this subject. Do you remember the passage my mother made us all extract, and talked so often of having engraved over the drawing-room door?

"*Il faudroit de bonne heure s'appliquer a bien faire les honneurs de sa maison; il n'y à rien qui sied plus mal qu'une froide insensibilité quand on est chez soi**."

* We should apply ourselves early to acquire the art of gracefully doing the honours of our house; nothing is so unbecoming as a cold insensibility under our own roof.

Accordingly there is, in the reception Geraldine gives to diffident or awkward visitors, an attention, a cheerful politeness, that quite wins their hearts. She is glad, perhaps, when they depart; yet never betrays concern when they arrive: but looks so easy, so contented, and yet so wholly abstains from assuming any odious airs of affability, that when I go home, I am determined to endeavour, in this respect to model my conduct upon hers. How glad my dear mother will be if I succeed! and how agreeable a surprise shall I excite amongst some of our neighbours at Parkton Castle!

Mrs. Neville and her party arrived at a very reasonable hour; and her appearance seemed to give the signal for animation and gaiety throughout the company. She was in excellent spirits; and, to use her own words, was in one of her *good days*; one of those humours which dispose her, now and then, to be in charity with the whole world.

She complimented Geraldine upon the good taste with which the rooms were ornamented; and said, the fragrance of the flowers, as she entered the house, had excited in her mind a thousand agreeable ideas; amongst others, that of Geraldine herself: "for," added she, "I have so often remarked your fondness for flowers, Miss Fauconberg, that neither the sight nor perfume of a fresh nosegay now ever reaches me, without presenting your image to 'my mind's eye.'"

"A very elegant association," said Lord Litchmere.

"And a very flattering one, I am sure," cried Geraldine.

"You are to know," resumed Mrs. Neville, "that I possess a happy knack of making these sort of mental combinations between persons and things. Sometimes, indeed, the parties concerned might not think themselves much indebted to me for the facility with which I unite their recollection with the sight, taste, or scent of inanimate objects. But when this happens

to be the case, I do my best to conceal such little amusing vagaries."

She then inquired, with much kindness, after the poor Negro, and was extremely pleased to learn he was doing well, and had, in the course of the day, borne, without injury, the fatigue of sitting up several hours.

"I am glad, she cried, "this happy result has attended your humane exertions, my dear Miss Fauconberg. I have been forbidden to express to you half the admiration with which your conduct inspired me: but this I *will* tell you, that it has left upon my heart so deep an impression, I shall never cease to honour and love you for it."

Blushing and confused, Geraldine seemed by no means displeased that the approach of Sir James Charlebury and his daughter terminated this conversation. Mrs. Neville immediately retreated from their vicinity, declaring that the stock of Christian charity with which she came provided, however considerable, was by no means proof against the shock which the very sight

of those people gave to it. As they are not much more in favour with me, I likewise stole away, and attached myself to a party of which Mr. and Mrs. Everley were members.

You will be surprised, perhaps, to find the name of *Mr. Everley* mentioned in so gay a scene: certain it is, that for many hours he was a pleased spectator of all that was going forward. His coming was a compliment paid to Geraldine, which she accepted so graciously, that I verily believe he would even have danced, had she, with the same smiling look, requested it.

As the moment for standing up drew near, I began to feel considerably embarrassed how to announce to Mr. Archer the sudden eclipse of my brother. The unpleasant task, however, was unavoidable; and, with all the qualifying varnish I could throw over it, I told the awkward truth: that is, I gave information of his absence, and spoke pathetically of the regret with which he departed; but very carefully

avoided mentioning the fair tempter who had seduced him to the deed.

Yet, notwithstanding the pains I took to soften the intelligence, I could perceive that it affected Mr. Archer in a very unpleasant manner. Obvious as was his displeasure, however, it exceeded not the chagrin and disappointment betrayed by Mrs. Neville. She asked Madame de St. Hermine (unwilling, perhaps, to apply to me) a thousand questions concerning Lesmore; and obtaining no satisfactory intelligence, appeared from that moment to lose all interest in what was passing around her; resolutely declined engaging herself to dance; and, after sitting some time at a window apart, followed two or three elderly ladies into an adjoining room, where a few, yet unoccupied, card-tables had been placed.

A revolution so sudden, and so ill concealed, could not easily escape the observation of Geraldine, who looked after her with an air of regret and concern. She had no leisure, however, to reflect long upon

the subject; for Lord Litchmere, informed of my brother's absence, came to request the honour of her hand for the first two, instead of the second two dances. She readily gave it; but not with equal readiness could she be prevailed upon to open the ball. After a short and civil contest between her and Lady Elizabeth Neville, the latter consented to call the first dance.

As the adjustment of this point of etiquette, and various other delays, had retarded the commencement of the ball to a considerably later hour than I had expected, I was now in momentary hope of seeing Ferdinand return. My eyes were perpetually directed towards the door; and, even when conversing with my partner, Colonel Courtville, I could not forbear turning half round whenever any gentleman passed near me. At length, the Colonel, sensible of the little attention I paid to all the fine things he was saying to me, asked, with a smile, whose arrival I was so anxiously looking for? This question rendered me more circumspect; I evaded answering it;

but struggled to appear less pre-occupied and restless.

The dance ended; and another, which, with scarcely any interval, succeeded it, concluded also: but still no Lesmore appeared. Provoked nearly as much as Mrs. Neville, I could willingly have joined in a little sullen duet with her; but I was not permitted: a third dance was called, and my new partner, Lord Litchmere, was in a humour so unusually talkative, that I could not disengage myself from him a moment. The theme of his conversation ought to have pleased me, since it was no other than the graces and perfections of Miss Fauconberg: but I am not liberal-minded enough to derive much pleasure from hearing her warmly praised by any young man except my brother. You will smile, Augusta, and suspect, perhaps, that I wish to engross the admiration of all others to myself: if such is your opinion of me, I will not attempt to refute it; but only say, that Lord Litchmere is one of the last whom I should listen to with satisfac-

tion upon this subject, from the persuasion I lie under, that his are not merely empty eulogiums, but that he seriously and passionately admires Geraldine, and may become, to our poor Ferdinand, a very formidable rival. Though grave at first, and somewhat cold and distant, he improves extremely upon acquaintance. In his countenance and appearance there is nothing striking; but he looks observant; his conversation denotes good sense and good nature; and his manners convey the idea of his being a thorough gentleman. Such a man, could I, without sorrow, resign the prospect of obtaining such a sister, I should most gladly see united to my loved Geraldine: but, as long as a spark of hope remains of her one day becoming the wife of Ferdinand, I shall never witness the attentions of Lord Litchmere without pain!

Whilst I was going down the dance with him, Geraldine found an opportunity to say—

"Mr. Lesmore is come back, Julia."—

"Is he?—How did you hear it?"

“ Mr. Everley saw him just now in the card-room.”

This answer gave me a pang at heart; and during the remainder of the dance, I could do nothing but picture to myself the snug little flirtation which I concluded was passing between Mrs. Neville and my brother.

My partner speedily discovered an alteration in my voice and looks.

“ Are you fatigued, Miss Lesmore?” said he.

“ No, my lord, not with dancing; but my own thoughts have fatigued me the greatest part of the evening.”

“ I wish there subsisted more conformity of sentiment between us;” resumed he—“ *My* thoughts never were half so agreeably occupied as they have been during the last two hours!”

Then pausing a moment, he presently added—“ Will it be permitted here to dance twice with the same partner?”

“ Indeed, my lord, I know no law against it.”

Scarcely had I uttered these words, when, as Geraldine followed us down the dance, I heard him to say to her,

"Have you a long list of engagements for the rest of the evening, Miss Fauconberg?"

"No, my lord; only for the next two dances."

He could say no more just then; but seizing eagerly the next opportunity of speaking to her, he obtained from her a promise that she would stand up with him again after supper.

My ill-humour was wrought up to its full climax by this arrangement, which threatened completely to exclude Lesmore from all chance of recovering his once-forfeited partner, and I scarcely could prevail upon myself to speak another word whilst the dance lasted. But Lord Litchmere was too happy to regard my taciturnity. His eyes followed Geraldine in every direction; not a step, not a movement of hers escaped him: and an expression of unsuppressed delight

brightened his countenance whenever the figure of the dance brought them together.

Meanwhile Colonel Courtville, who had succeeded him as the partner of the fair lady of his affection, was doing the best he could, by flattery and insinuation, to win her to himself. He looked 'unutterable things;' now smiled, now languished; and performed to perfection the character of an enamoured and dying swain. All this I beheld with the most complete indifference: he cannot, I am well assured, be the kind of man Geraldine would ever approve: but judge my surprise, when, on casting a glance towards the card-room door, I at length beheld Ferdinand, leaning against its side, looking earnestly and gravely at Geraldine, and scarcely appearing to hear, or to know how he answered, the lively observations addressed to him, from time to time, by Mrs. Neville, who stood beside him. I persuaded myself he was jealous of the colonel, and the suspicion made me ample amends for all the vexation I had endured through-

out the evening!—But, jealous of the vapid Colonel Courtville!—Is such an infatuation to be pardoned?

When we were returning to our seats, I saw Lesmore approach Geraldine, whom he detained several minutes in conversation. She looked at him as serenely, and answered him as cheerfully, as if she had every reason in the world to be satisfied with his conduct. Not equally placid did he appear, when, their little dialogue ended, she proceeded to a vacant chair next mine. I was curious to know what had passed, and she readily informed me.

"Your brother wished me to dance with him; and when I acquainted him with my two present engagements, seemed to think that by the time they were over, the company would be dispersing."

"And was he pleased to murmur?"

"No; but he professed great concern: and, as in gratitude bound, I returned the compliment, and declared myself equally chagrined."

This light manner of speaking of what

was, perhaps, to him a serious disappointment, would not have been very gratifying to poor Ferdinand's vanity: but Geraldine seems not to have a suspicion that he has, in any thing which relates to her, the smallest degree of feeling.

Soon after, we were joined by Mr. Archer.

"Well," said he, addressing me, "your brother has been making a thousand apologies for so suddenly absconding, and promises to clear up the whole mystery to us to-morrow. A long story is connected with it, which there is now no opportunity of relating."

Then, turning to Geraldine—"It is past one o'clock," said he, "and we shall presently go to supper. Who do you dance with, my dear, afterwards?"

"With Mr. Charlebury, and Lord Litchmere."

"Lord Litchmere? Why, he has been your partner already."

"It is very true, my dear uncle; but he asked me again, and I did not know upon what plea to refuse him."

Mr. Archer said no more; but I thought he looked good-naturedly vexed that Ferdinand was thus deprived of the prospect of obtaining her hand.

In our way to the supper-room, I saw, peeping through a glass door that opened into the hall, Geraldine's *protegé*, the poor Negro, creditably equipped in a livery-suit lent him by one of the servants; and watching the ladies as they passed, with the most eager attention. When Geraldine, without observing him, drew near his hiding place, his countenance kindled up into an expression of joy amounting almost to rapture! The lamp which depended from the cieling of the hall, cast a strong light upon his large uplifted eyes; and his lips moved, as if invoking blessings upon the head of his lovely preserver. I was sensibly touched by this quiet testimony of heartfelt gratitude, and, waiting till every body had passed me, approached the window behind which he was stationed. On perceiving me advance, he was hastily retiring: but nodding to encourage him, I half opened the

door, and inquiring after his health, expressed some concern to see him up at so late an hour.

"No hurt me, lady," said he, "to come and look at good angel. Hear the music all the evening, and begged so hard just for one peep, they lend me clothes, and put me in this passage."

"You knew your kind friend again, directly, I saw."

"Know her!—Ah lady! Cæsar never speak, never think, never dream of any thing but good angel, ever since she save his life!"

The tears glistened in the honest creature's eyes whilst he spoke, and I felt my own beginning to start.

"Good night, Cæsar," cried I.—"If you like to stay here a little longer, I will send you a glass of wine."

"No, thank you, lady;—good night." He then withdrew, and I repaired to the gay party in the supper room."

I found an unoccupied seat near Mr. Archer, and while every body was talking

round us, related to him, without being overheard, the little dialogue in which I had just been engaged.

"Poor fellow!" cried my benevolent auditor, "he shows a wonderfully grateful disposition. I must try and put him in some way of obtaining an honest maintenance. Is he young or old? What does he seem fit for?"

"I had not a very distinct view of him in that obscure passage; but I think he looked young."

Mr. Archer then said he would have a little conversation with him the next day; and if any scheme could be suggested to his advantage, he should be anxious to promote it, were it only to gratify his compassionate Geraldine.

Mrs. Neville, during supper, I observed, entirely recovered her good-humour; and with admirable address divided her attention between her two neighbours, Col. Courtville, and my brother; that is to say, she *accepted* the ever-ready homage of the

former; whilst, with more seriousness, she condescended to *court* the attention of Ferdinand. Lord Litchmere, meanwhile, had the good fortune of engrossing, almost exclusively, the conversation of our fair friend, and looked the happiest of men.

At whose suggestion I know not, for amidst the hum of so many voices, it is difficult to distinguish one speaker from another, but, at the very moment I thought we were going to rise from table, Mr. and Miss Charlebury, and a lady who sat near them, suddenly burst forth into a loud glee. This was succeeded by another, and that by a third; and perhaps the good people might have been singing now, had not Mr. Archer civilly, but frankly interfered.—

"Ladies and gentlemen," cried he, "if any of you are so tasteless as to prefer dancing to singing, I advise you to return into the ball-room, and make the best of your time. As for Sir James and myself, and a few more who have less activity in our legs than 'music in our souls,' we will

stay and listen to these delightful harmonists as long as they have a note to bestow upon us."

There was an almost universal rising up, on hearing words so friendly, I believe, to the general wish: the crowd and pressure at the door of the supper-room was truly ridiculous. As if instigated by one spirit, they all seemed eager to avoid, what some amongst them, perhaps would with less fastidious companions, have anxiously sought to obtain. But so it is, I have often heard it remarked, in all ranks of life; people fly *to* or *from* an amusement according as they behold the majority press forward or retreat: the greater the bustle and the rush, the greater, of course, must be the triumph of escaping from what is bad, or gaining access to what is good.

The various exclamations of the young ladies when we reached the hall, were equally entertaining—"Dear, I am so glad to have got away!" cried one. "And I was so horridly tired!" cried another. "And I do so hate glees!" added a third. "And,

do you know," said a fourth, stepping eagerly forward—" Miss Charlebury wants to propose French country-dances; I am sure, I hope she'll not be able to make up a set. They are the most tiresome things in the world to arrange; and unless the dancing master is standing by, always go wrong." Thus they went on, till Mrs. Everley, growing tired of attending to them, took me by the arm, and led me away.

When deprived of so large a proportion of their auditors, Miss Charlebury and her brother declined singing any more; and in a short time the latter came to claim the hand of his promised partner. I stood up with an officer whom Colonel Courtville introduced to me; and he himself, with considerable difficulty, prevailed upon Mrs. Neville to go down one dance with him. Lesmore, I believe, wished to have remained an inactive spectator of what was passing; but a motive of good nature, induced him to change his purpose.

Amongst the company present was a Mrs. Fairfax, a lady reduced by some fa-

mily misfortunes from a state of the highest affluence, into one of comparative indigence. Her daughter was with her, an only child, and a girl of the most pleasing and interesting appearance. Yet, how it happened I do not know, but this poor thing had never been asked to dance the whole evening. Geraldine had in vain exerted herself to procure her a partner; the gentlemen all pleaded prior engagements; and, deserted, diffident, and almost dejected, poor Emily Fairfax still kept her post beside her mother, an unnoticed looker-on at the gaiety in which she was not invited to partake.

Neither Geraldine nor I, could, after supper, continue to witness such cruel neglect without concern, and almost indignation. Scarcely a disengaged man, except Ferdinand, remained in the room.

"Do you think, Julia," said Geraldine, looking wishfully towards him—"your brother would dance with her?"

"Try your influence over him;" answered I—"he owes you some compensa-

tion for his abominable conduct this evening, and can do no less than comply with so reasonable a request."

Geraldine begged Mr. Charlebury, her partner, to tell my brother she wished to speak with him; and when he came, after apologizing for sending to him, she said—"Your sister and I, Mr. Lesmore, think, that in applying to you to perform an act at once of gallantry and good nature, we are secure of success. Have we," added she, "trusted to a broken reed?"

"I hope not. What is it you wish me to do?"

"We should both be delighted if you would allow Madame de St. Hermine to introduce you to the young lady sitting near the door, and take her out to dance. She scarcely knows any body present, and has not yet stood up."

"I will do this," replied Lesmore, with alacrity—"or any thing else Miss Fauconberg deigns to request, with the utmost pleasure. She never harbours a wish that

is not founded on some kind and considerate motive."

He then went in search of Madame de St. Hermine, who gladly consented to perform the part of mistress of the ceremonies, and presented him to Miss Fairfax in due form. Distant as we were from them, we could yet discern evident symptoms of surprise and pleasure in the faces of both mother and daughter. The latter, whose pretty little ball dress had long been vainly pinned up, gave Ferdinand her hand with a modest blush, and accompanied him towards the dancers. Geraldine and I were standing together; and fearful that she would find no place but at the bottom of the set, we made signs to Lesmore to bring her up to us. He complied; and we found room for her between us; did all in our power to dissipate the sort of embarrassment she seemed, at first, to feel; and had the pleasure to observe, that before the dance was half over, she recovered her spirits, and appeared to forget all the mortifications of the evening.

I am persuaded many young men are so weak as always to stand aloof from action, even in the most trifling affairs, till some one encourages them, by example, to perform what is right. Hitherto, by the leading beaux in the room, poor Emily had been overlooked; but as soon as she was seen dancing with Lesmore, and courted by Miss Fauconberg, she gained notice from every body else; was admired for her pretty figure; thought an excellent dancer; and engaged for the two next sets, even before Ferdinand relinquished her hand.

As Lord Litchmere, proud of his prize, was leading Geraldine up the room for the second time, my brother for a moment detained her—

"*Should* there be any more dancing after this, Miss Fauconberg, may I hope you will keep yourself disengaged for me?"

"With great pleasure"—answered she.

Highly gratified by this answer, he bowed, and suffered her to proceed: whilst I, anxious that his ready civility to Miss Fairfax should not pass unrewarded, went to

make interest in his favour with Mr. Archer.

"Well, well," cried he, good humouredly, "we will see what can be done for this perverse fellow. But really it grows very late, and half the folks are wanting to get home. Why did he not stay and dance with her when he might?"

"You say, yourself, dear sir, that we are to hear all his reasons for that to-morrow. Meanwhile, have the generosity to exert yourself a little for him to-night."

He promised to do all in his power; and having myself declined dancing any more—the gentleman who asked me was Mr. Charlebury—I took a chair for the rest of the evening next to Madame de St. Hermine.

We were both full of conjectures as to the yet unexplained cause of Lesmore's tardy appearance in the ball room. Ever ready to plead for him, Madame de St. Hermine professed a strong belief that his motive for disappearing was such as, when known, would redound to his credit; and soothed by prognostics so agreeable, I listened till

the remembrance of Mary almost vanished from my mind.

The anxious wish Ferdinand had evinced of dancing with his once rejected partner, was at length gratified. Though it was now near five o'clock, and nearly half the company had departed, those who remained were sufficiently numerous to make up a very tolerable set. Mr. Archer himself, urging them once more to stand up, a sprightly air was called, and the two persons for whom I was so much interested, led off this last dance with a spirit and animation, that brightened the fine countenance of Madame de St. Hermine with smiles; enchanted Mr. Archer; and gave a glow to my own heart such as only in its happiest moments it has ever known.

Thus ended this long-talked-of ball; the conclusion of which fully repaid me for the chagrin I had endured at its commencement. To Geraldine, I believe, the evening proved uninterruptedly agreeable. Mrs. Neville, like myself, found it chequered with good and bad—and the rest of the com-

pany retired apparently extremely well satisfied.

Two or three families, residing at a considerable distance from hence, had been invited to take beds here, and accepted the offer. We therefore sat down to breakfast this morning a very large party; and had no conversation but upon matter-of-fact subjects. When these guests departed, the two gentlemen rode out, and to us the history of Mary is as great a mystery as ever.

I must here close this enormous letter: but rest assured you shall not be suffered to remain in ignorance of the explanation we are promised. Adieu, my two dear sisters; you perceive I take it for granted Caroline claims the privilege of seeing every letter I write from hence. Adieu again!

Yours ever,

JULIA LESMORE.

LETTER XVII.

MISS LESMORE TO THE SAME.

Sept. 26.

WITHOUT comment or preface, I now sit down to give you, in Lesmore's own words, the history of the origin and progress of his acquaintance with poor Mary.

No allusion was made to the subject, till, tea being over yesterday evening, the shutters closed, the curtains drawn, and our several apparatus of employment spread out upon the table before us, Mr. Archer thus opened the cause—

"Whilst you, ladies, were sitting at home this morning to recover from the fatigues of your nocturnal revels, I was listening to a little history which I must now request the kind narrator will not think me too encroaching if I solicit him to repeat: I would save him this trouble; but a man

relates a story but awkwardly in the presence of the person from whom he heard it."

Madame de St. Hermine besought my brother to comply with this request; Geraldine kept her eyes fixed upon one of the scenes of a little theatre she is painting for Charles Davenant, and was perfectly silent; I looked, I doubt not, extremely curious, but likewise forbore speaking, and tried to go on very attentively with the work-box I was ornamenting for my mother. Lesmore had by far the most awkward part to perform, being unprepared with any better employment, than that of snipping, with Madame de St. Hermine's scissars, every bit of thread or paper which lay in his way! Even this humble resource, the owner of the mischievous little weapon, had the cruelty to deprive him of two or three times; and then he had nothing for it, but to play with Mr. Archer's spectacle-case; for aware that that gentleman had excited general expectation from him, he was nearly as much em-

barrassed as Geraldine herself used formerly to be in his awful presence!

At length—"I could not," said he, "thus formidably called upon, consent to undertake a relation which compels me to make self so prominent a personage, if my conduct towards Miss Fauconberg, last night, did not demand from me every explanation in my power to give. About three weeks ago," continued he, gaining more courage, "during one of my solitary shooting excursions, I was surprised, whilst at some distance from home, by a sudden thunder-shower. In order to seek shelter, I turned out of my road, and went up to a farm-house, which, however, I almost hesitated whether to enter, when, on a nearer approach, the only person I beheld within was a young woman, reading a letter at the window, and crying over it with every appearance of sorrow and distress. I observed her for some minutes without being myself perceived: but the shower becoming heavier, and no other house being in sight, I at length

ventured to solicit a temporary refuge. At the sound of my voice, she started; and her first care was to thrust the letter she held into her pocket; but then, dispersing her tears, she civilly told me I was welcome to come in; brought me a chair; and even offered the protection of her roof to Mr. Archer's game-keeper who attended me. He declined it, however; but found shelter under the porch; and the girl after acquitting herself of these rites of hospitality, sat down to her spinning-wheel, without taking of me any further notice.

"The shower was of considerable duration, and whilst I sauntered about, examining the homely decorations of the apartment, and looking into the few well-thumbed books deposited upon a shelf behind the door, I overheard, from time to time, many a deep-drawn sigh proceed from the bosom of my young hostess.

"Much concerned for her, I could not long forbear hazarding some indirect inquiries into the cause of her affliction. Stopping near her spinning-wheel, after

having made the tour of the room, I asked her to whom the farm belonged?

"To my father, sir; Farmer Chadworth."

"And do you keep house for him?"

"Yes, sir; for I have no mother, and my sisters are quite children."

"You are so useful a person at home, then," I added, laughing, "that your father will be unwilling to part with you; and yet, there must be many a man anxious to have so pretty a wife."

A faint blush crossed her cheek; and, sighing again, she answered—"Not *many*, sir, I dare say."

"Well, but if there be only a few, only *one*, he has little chance of obtaining you till your sisters grow up."

"Ah!" cried she, not aware of the inference to which she led—"it is not on account of wanting me at home my father refuses."—

"There she stopped—looked distressed at her own unguardedness, and the tears once more stole down her cheeks. I affected

not to observe her agitation, and continuing in the same tone of raillery said—" Fathers are often sad torments to poor girls who have lovers: but if the house is frequently left, as to day, in your sole care, you must have so many opportunities of seeing yours, that you may bear, better than many others, any delay required of you."

" Delay!" she repeated, shaking her head—" Ah, that's not all!"

" In short," added Ferdinand, " the innocent girl betrayed herself so unconsciously, that with scarcely any farther trouble, I became acquainted with all her little history."

Here let me ask you, Augusta, should you have thought our brother, taciturn and grave as he usually is with strangers, could so speedily and so dexterously have penetrated into the secrets of a female heart? Madame de St. Hermine looked very arch whilst he repeated this short dialogue, and Geraldine seemed listening with the profoundest attention.

" It seems," proceeded Lesmore, " that

this poor young woman had, for near a twelvemonth, been permitted by her father, though with some reluctance, on account of the youth of his other children, to encourage the addresses of the son of a neighbouring farmer, in circumstances nearly similar to his own. The young people were willing to defer the marriage a year or two longer, provided they might be allowed occasionally to meet at each other's houses; and the fathers, satisfied with their patience and docility, gave them every reason to believe their future union decided upon. About a month, however, before the time I am speaking of, the two farmers had a furious quarrel, and old Chadworth returning home, one day, trembling with passion, threatened Mary with his malediction if she ever admitted within his doors, or spoke again to the son of his detested neighbour. The terrified girl, ventured not, at that moment, to contest this arbitrary command: but when time had, she hoped, a little assuaged his resentment, she pleaded with all the eloquence in her power for her-

self and her unoffending lover. Chadworth was inflexible; he spoke not with the same violence as before; but his prohibition was equally peremptory, and yet more stern. Day after day, week after week elapsed, and Mary, dreading the execution of her father's menace, secluded herself so sedulously, to avoid all chance of encountering young William, that he, having received orders equally rigorous not to visit her, had recourse to his pen, and wrote the very letter I had seen her so fondly weeping over. After intrusting me with these particulars of her situation, the artless girl made no difficulty of putting into my hands a treasure she so highly valued. I read it with surprise; though worded with the utmost simplicity, there was nothing coarsely rustic in it; the writing, though not free, was clear and plain, and the spirit of affection by which it seemed dictated, breathed an air of genuine and manly fervour. I restored to her the letter with many encomiums upon its writer's heart; promised, as I was to remain some time in the neigh-

bourhood, to get acquainted with the young man, and, if possible, to devise, in concert with him, some means of reconciling the two farmers. Mary was considerably revived and comforted by these assurances; and our conversation being soon after interrupted by the tumultuous arrival from school of a tribe of little rosy brothers and sisters, I took my leave of her, uttering a thousand thanks for the hospitable reception she had given me.

"Previous to quitting her, however, I had obtained full information respecting the abode of her lover, and learnt, that in addition to his agricultural knowledge, he possessed a very ingenious turn for little works of mechanism, and had a shop near his father's house where he often employed his evening hours. Thither I, the next day, sought him, under the pretence of wishing to look at some of his performances. The moment I beheld him, his appearance prepossessed me in his favour. I think I never saw a finer figure, united to a more spirited and open countenance. Wholly

unsuspicious of the real motive of my visit, he was evidently flattered by the notice I seemed willing to bestow upon his labours; showed and explained to me, with wonderful perspicuity, several specimens of his ingenuity; and, after a conversation of above an hour, invited me to walk into the house, and taste some of his father's home-brewed ale. I complied, from a wish of getting likewise acquainted with the old man; and William, leading the way, obtained me a reception of such frank cordiality, that I immediately felt myself at home. A quiet, civil, elderly woman, the aunt of William, had the superintendence of the family concerns; and every thing around me looked so neat, orderly, and comfortable, that it was without an effort I made advances towards securing her good graces by a little well-merited praise of her notability.

"This first interview with my interesting young man terminated without my making any allusion to Mary Chadworth: but, in the course of a few days, I visited him again; and then acquainted him with as

much of the purport of her communication as I thought requisite. He was surprised at the knowledge I seemed to have of his concerns: but the openness with which I spoke upon the subject, obviated all tendency to mistrust or jealousy, and he made no scruple of considering me as his friend. The cause of his father's breach with Chadworth originated in a dispute relative to some bargain, respecting which, each accused the other of unfair dealing. Chadworth, however, had been much the most violent; and William, from the knowledge he had of the lengths to which, in many instances, his resentment had carried him, expressed a strong apprehension that this fatal disagreement would never be accommodated.

"Then, what," said I, "will you resolve upon? Have you the courage to renounce your mistress?"

"That, sir," replied he, with firmness, "would not be courage, but corwardice and ill faith!—I will, on the contrary, do all in my power to prevail upon Mary to abide

steadily by her promises to me. Whatever causes of complaint my father may have against Mr. Chadworth, I am well assured his house and heart will always be open to her: and if he has forbidden any intercourse between us at present, it is only because he feared, if Mr. Chadworth and I met, we might have high words, and so widen the breach."

"I applaud your spirit and constancy, William: but it is possible that Mary's meek temper, subdued entirely by her angry father, may render her fearful of complying with your wishes."

"Then, sir," replied he, all the animation with which he had so lately spoken, giving way to a look of despondency, "then my resolution is taken! I will forsake this part of the world: if the happy prospect I once looked forward to is entirely overcast, I will enlist as a soldier, and try to forget every thing which has hitherto been most dear to me!"

"A resolution so desperate I did all in my power to counteract: but William's thoughts

had taken a gloomy turn; he listened to me with considerable impatience; appeared wholly unconvinced by my representations, and manifested the most immoveable, though quiet, inflexibility.

"But let me," continued Ferdinand, "endeavour to abridge my recital. You already know enough," addressing Geraldine and me, "to account for the interest I seemed to take in the distress of the young woman who called here last night. I will now hasten to the motive which induced me so suddenly to disappear from the ball-room.

"Since my first visit to the farm-house where Mary resides, I had found means of becoming acquainted with her father, and had vainly attempted by every argument I could urge, and every motive I could suggest, to soften his obdurate temper. But I soon perceived that self-interest had as great a share as anger in rendering him impenetrable to all I could recommend. He hoped, by stubborn intractability, to obtain from William's father, the possession, upon his

wn terms, of the object in dispute. My concern for the poor young people, sacrificed to this mean spirit of extortion, might, possibly, have induced me to interfere with more substantial assistance in their favour: but Chadworth, already rich, had no excuse for a rapacity which every honest mind must revolt from the idea of fostering and encouraging. I proposed to him to leave the matter to arbitration. Impracticable and stupidly insensible alike to pity for his daughter, or shame for himself, he bluntly refused all reference; rejected all counsel; and resented all remonstrance. Despairing of accomplishing any useful purpose, I ceased resorting to his house; occasionally looking in upon William, now grown almost entirely hopeless, and evincing considerable depression; but for these last ten days, had neither seen, nor heard any thing relating to his unhappy mistress.

"I will not attempt to describe to you the affliction with which the pitiable girl was overwhelmed, when, last night, she came

to inform me her rash lover had actually engaged with a recruiting party, now stationed at N——!"

Here Geraldine, with a look of dismay, suddenly looked up and exclaimed,

"Oh, Mr. Lesmore! could you not save him?"

"I determined, at least," answered he, much pleased by the generous solicitude she betrayed, "not to omit any means of convincing myself the report was true. Mary, in her extreme agitation, might, very probably, have mistaken rumour for certainty: she acknowledged, that without waiting to make any inquiries, she had taken one of her young brothers by the hand, and, her father being absent, flown to me for advice the moment the distressful tidings had reached her. No time, it appeared to me, ought to be lost. I therefore determined to go immediately in search of William, and learn from himself the exact state of the affair."

"Ah, why," again interrupted Geraldine, deeply interested in the narrative, "why did you deny us the pleasure of knowing,

last night, the meritorious errand you were going upon?"

"Could I," said Lesmore, "at such a moment, enter upon the particulars of so long a story? It was not without effort, and an internal struggle, little, perhaps, to my credit, that I resolved upon tearing myself away: but I was fortified by the hope, which you have now condescended to verify, that whatever appearance my conduct might wear at the time, when you came to be informed of its motives, you would sanction and approve them."

I could not, during this little dialogue, chase from my mind the recollection of the one with which we were lately all so much struck in *Adele de Senange*. Feelingly, however, as Geraldine participated in the inquietudes of William and his mistress, she showed no disposition to address to Lesmore the fond remonstrance of *Adele*: but having listened to the brief apology he made for his previous silence, suffered him to resume his story.

"As I proceeded across the fields, with

Mary and her brother, to the abode of Farmer Weston, William's father, I heard from her that since the first letter I had seen her, reading, he had written to her repeatedly, exerting his utmost powers of supplication to induce her, without further delay, to become his wife. She had answered him briefly, but kindly; avoiding to grieve him by any positive denial, yet withheld, by dread of her father, from daring to assent to his wishes.

"The preceding evening, she continued, he had sent her, by a young woman, the zealous friend of both, a letter more pressing and earnest than any she had ever received from him. It was gloomy too; and seemed written half in anger. She was frightened at its general tenour; and shocked to think that disappointment had produced the effect of so cruelly altering his mild and cheerful temper. She had no means, however, of answering him; for before she had thoroughly considered his arguments, her father came in from the fields, employed her on different errands

about the house, and, at last, made her sit down to transcribe some accounts for him. The young woman who had promised William to carry him a reply, finding it grew late, and not knowing what motive to assign for remaining after Chadworth's return, now unwillingly departed, and Mary was forced, with whatever reluctance, to let her go. The following morning she added, whilst the children were at school, and her father busy about his farm, William, for the first time since their meetings had been interdicted, suddenly appeared before her as she sat at work. He looked pale, and seemed agitated and hurried. At sight of him, she shook from head to foot; the bare possibility of his being surprised by her father, filled her with terror; and yet he had so wild and strange an expression about the eyes, she did not dare press him to retire. He staid with her above an hour, employing that whole time in endeavouring to persuade her to go off with him to a relation of his in Wales, and there to become his wife. She scarcely answered him but

with her tears;—he required a positive and immediate decision;—still she was silent: he again, and with more vehemence, renewed his entreaties; and, on her fearfully signifying her refusal, rushed out of the house like one distracted, and had not been heard of again, till news was brought her of his having undoubtedly enlisted.

"This little explanation brought us to the door of William's house. I will not dwell upon the grief depicted on the honest countenance of his father, or the lamentations of their affectionate relation. The sight of me, however, seemed to cheer them; and they gave to the weeping Mary a reception the most friendly. I eagerly asked to speak to William; they told me he had not been at home since the fatal engagement, as they were informed, had taken place. I then committed Mary to the care of her lover's aunt, and proceeded, with farmer Weston, to N—— in search of his unhappy son.

"We had little difficulty in finding him, seated in a public-house, amidst a number of riotous and half-intoxicated countrymen.

But he was himself perfectly sober, though evidently oppressed by a melancholy the most profound. I called for a private room, whither he suffered himself to be led almost unconsciously. Had you beheld the unfortunate young man at that moment, the impression would never have been erased from your memory. Mr. Archer has seen him, and allows that he never, in any station of life, met with an exterior more manly, frank, and animated. But, at the time I am speaking of, the fire of his intelligent eye was dim; the elasticity of his movements was changed into languor and apparent apathy; his voice, when painfully induced to speak, was hoarse and tremulous; in short, he sat before me, the truest and most affecting image of youthful despair it is well possible to conceive.

"My conference with him was long, and its event for a considerable time remained doubtful; but I found with joy that he had yet entered into no indissoluble engagement, owing to the accidental absence of the recruiting serjeant, and in the end I proved successful."

Here we all uttered an exclamation of delight, and Geraldine in particular, whose feelings had been worked up to a painful degree, might have repeated what she once said on a different occasion:—"had a mountain been removed from my chest, the relief could not have been greater to my oppressed respiration." She literally scarcely seemed to breathe, whilst in suspense relative to the fate of poor William; but joy now sparkled in her eyes, and the approving smile she bestowed on Lesmore, seemed at once to thrill through his soul, and to indicate the genuine sensibility of her own.

Our raptures a little moderated, he thus concluded his tale:—

"William being finally prevailed upon to go home, I walked with him and his father to their own door. He was now, in some measure, restored to his usual self-possession, and informed us that on the preceding day he had received, what he considered as unquestionable intelligence, that Chadworth meditated forming a new connexion for his daughter, and had even

pledged his word to suffer no opposition on her part to delay the match he now projected beyond the period of a month. How far his officious informant deserved credit, I will not pretend to decide; certain it is, that this communication, and Mary's steady refusal to become the partner of his flight, drove him to extremities, and assisted to confirm him in the resolution from which I had so much difficulty to dissuade him.

"When we reached farmer Weston's door, Mary, who had ventured to wait for our return, ran out to inquire into our success. At sight of her lover, whom, perhaps, she scarcely retained a hope of ever beholding again, a rapturous exclamation burst from her, and, sobbing like an infant, she threw her arms about his neck. I believe she would have hardly scrupled, next, to bestow on me the same favour: her gratitude for the service I had been able to ren er her was unbounded, and so contagious was the same sentiment throughout the party, that it was with difficulty I, at length, tore myself away.

"This morning, Mr. Archer, after hearing

William's history, desired to be conducted to his father's farm. We rode thither together, and entertain very sanguine hopes of being able to compromise the difference between the two old men; and, perhaps, ere many weeks elapse, of congratulating Mary on becoming the happy wife of her faithful, but too impetuous lover."

Here Ferdinand ceased; and with one consent, we all united in loading him with thanks for his relation, and praises for his conduct. He bowed, looked gratified by our approbation; but, as soon as he could, sought to give to our thoughts and conversation a different direction, and begged Geraldine to indulge us with a little music.

She was rising with alacrity, as if eager to comply with the slightest intimation of his wishes, when Mr. Archer told her with a smile, to sit down again.

"Our young man," added he, "has not thoroughly finished his story: let me supply the deficiency. Know, then, that hearing, upon inquiry, the chief objection on the part of Weston to complying with the unconscionable demands of Chadworth ori-

ginated in some temporary difficulties which rendered it inconvenient to him to part, at an under price, from the object in contention, Lesmore generously engaged himself, last night, to make up the deficiency to Weston, upon condition he would consent to let the marriage treaty between his son and Chadworth's daughter be renewed. The offer, though long opposed by William, was gratefully accepted by his father. Chadworth, meanly, but happily for the young people, has agreed to abide by his original terms: and, as Lesmore says, every thing now seems in a fair and prosperous train."

"Thank you, dearest uncle," cried Geraldine, "for this admirable little appendix: it indeed makes the story complete."

"I must," said Madame de St. Hermine, "become acquainted with the interesting William, and his pretty Mary."

"Mr. Archer," cried Ferdinand, "has already found means of facilitating that circumstance. He has promised the young couple a wedding-dinner here."

"Have you, uncle?" said Geraldine, "how kind a thought!"

"But now, pray," said I, "allow me to go from white to black, and inquire what has been decided upon for poor Cæsar? you promised to speak to him to day, Mr. Archer."

"I fulfilled my engagement, Julia; and Cæsar and I have come to an engagement, with which he seems perfectly satisfied. I have every possible reason to believe in the truth of the story he related to us. Others of the crew, though merely common seamen, have been saved as well as himself. The account they give, which has been inserted in some of the newspapers, coincides exactly with his own. It is accurate as to the name of the vessel; as to that of the different passengers, amongst whom was his unfortunate master; as to the island they came from, and the port to which they were steering. It seems, he was what, I believe, is called a *house slave*; and was coming over here in quality of footman to his deceased master. I have offered him, for the

present, a post somewhat menial, under the butler: but if he conducts himself to my satisfaction in that station, after a time I mean to raise him to the high honour of being Geraldine's own lacquey. Do you approve this arrangement, ladies?"

We all gave to it the most cordial sanction, and having duly discussed the subject, Geraldine was again called upon to take her place at the instrument.

Now, my two dear sisters, may I not indulge myself in lavishing praises upon our active, kind, and generous brother? Is not this a narrative to do him honour in the eyes of Geraldine? Is it not, as Madame de St. Hermine observed to me, the noblest and most touching way of courting a feeling heart? I am sure my mother would be delighted by the relation; I write to her often: but the detail I have given you is too long to be transcribed. I must intrust to you, therefore, the care of transmitting it to her. Adieu, my dear sisters.

JULIA LESMORE.

LETTER XVIII.

MISS LESSMORE TO THE SAME.

Sept. 29.

YESTERDAY morning, whilst Madame de St. Hermine, Geraldine, and I were sitting in the dressing-room, a note was delivered to the former from Miss Charlebury, requesting the direction, and all particulars as to terms and method of teaching, of some master who had been employed for Geraldine, and whom Madame de St. Hermine had once accidentally mentioned in Miss Charlebury's presence.

We could not listen to the characteristic tenour of this billet without a little disposition to simper; and, as the master in question (a very irascible and petulant personage) had only attended Geraldine whilst in town, represented to ourselves the consternation and disgust of the poor man, when, on his arrival from such a distance, he found himself condemned, for a month, perhaps,

to listen to the pompous harangues of Sir James, and endure patiently the self-sufficiency of his daughter.

"All these witty conjectures," said Madame de St. Hermine, unable wholly to repress her own smiles, "may be very amusing to you, young ladies; but they by no means assist me in devising a pretty, civil note to my accomplished correspondent. I wish one of you would answer it."

We both begged to be excused: but Geraldine, to render the task as easy to her as she could, brought her own writing-box, and placed it before her; supplied her with a packet of fresh pens; promised to give her no disturbance; and undertook to get the taper lighted, ready to seal the note as soon as it should be concluded. This, when once it was begun, speedily happened; and Madame de St. Hermine, as much rejoiced as a child who has finished its task, was returning to the occupation she had previously been pursuing, when, on closing the writing-box, an inner lid flew open, and several loose papers fell upon the table.

"Here are verses!" cried she, collecting them together; "are they your own, Geraldine?"

"O, pray put them up!" cried Geraldine, with some earnestness; "they are nothing, mere nonsense: pray do not look at them!"

"Certainly, without your permission, I would not for the world: but what nonsense can my Geraldine write which she fears to commit to the eye of her friend? I have never been severe upon your former attempts; and, I own, it would give me pain to think you now meant to withhold your confidence."

"Now, nor ever do I mean it!" cried the affectionate Geraldine, rising with emotion, and embracing Madame de St. Hermine, "take them, dearest madam, read them all: I have not, I hope, a thought which I would seriously wish to conceal from you. My only reason for requesting your forbearance on this occasion, was the fear of being accused, in one of these little pieces, of having given way to something like a

spirit of ill-nature against your favourite, Mr. Lesmore."

"Against Ferdinand!" cried I; "O, my dear Geraldine, how has he, of late, deserved it?"

She smiled at the promptitude with which, "jealous in honour," I was prepared to take alarm in my brother's cause.

"Do not imagine me very rancorous," said she; "read these lines, and acquit me, at least of all bitterness of recrimination."

She then put into our hands, and Madame de St. Hermine and I perused together, the following stanzas:—

A youth, not moulded of our common clay,
But proudly conscious of superior worth,
Cast, on an humble maid, a dazzling ray
From eyes that call'd her mantling blushes forth.

She saw disdain enthron'd upon his brow,
And turn'd aside to hide the starting tear
Which anger, more than sorrow, taught to flow—
A guest unbidden, struggling to appear.

Much to his praise affection's voice had breath'd
With partial zeal in her attentive ear;
She wish'd to love him—wish'd his name enwreath'd
'Mongst those of kindred friends long held most dear

But, ah! how soon these air-built hopes dispers'd,
Nor left a vestige of their "wreck behind!"
One sigh she gave—then, all her plans revers'd,
Call'd on chill apathy the wound to bind.

The wounds of pride heal quick—unlike the grief
Which lac'rates and consumes an aching heart!
The anger of the humble maid was brief—
The youth within her bosom left no dart.

But how inscrutable's the human mind!
The veil withdrawn, dismiss'd the stern disguise,
Behold a wonder! In his breast enshrin'd,
Beats a kind heart—disprover of his eyes!

These lines are not without their due portion of severity, it must be allowed; yet the *aigre-doux* compliment in the concluding stanza, the affected amazement on discovering that he really possessed some feeling, drew from me a smile in despite of myself. Madame de St. Hermine laughed heartily, and seemed the more amused from observing the sort of constraint, the little air of pique with which I endeavoured to purse up my mouth after reading them.

"The verses," said she, stretching forth her hand to their pretty author, "are very pardonable sort of verses; you have had, in

time past, ample provocation for them: and, if you promise never to write any thing again of the same sarcastic nature against my *favourite*, as you justly call him, I will not only absolve you from this present sin, but defend you valiantly against all accusers. Come, Julia, be placable, and acknowledge, what I am sure your brother himself would not scruple to confess, that he has fairly merited this little epigrammatic *badinage*."

The speaking eyes of Geraldine seemed begging forgiveness; so that, in pledge of peace, I graciously extended my hand, saying—

"And when was this saucy composition penned?"

"The last stanza was written during the first leisure moment I had after hearing the story of William and Mary; I can scarcely tell when the preceding ones were composed."

"Then you have really been residing under the same roof with poor Ferdinand full six weeks, and considering him the whole time as a being *stern, proud*, and *disdainful?*"

"All poets, whether good or bad," answered she, laughing, "are privileged, you know, to employ some degree of exaggeration."

She then rose up, and invited me to walk out with her: but I declined it, wishing to look at the remaining verses which she very readily permitted me to read. Madame de St. Hermine, however, chose to accompany her, and I was left to follow my own humour.

I had been alone about a quarter of an hour, and was still examining with great interest and pleasure the detached productions with which Geraldine had intrusted me, when, as I believed, almost for the first time since his arrival here, Ferdinand entered the room—

"Julia," said he, "I am writing to my mother; have you any message to send her?"

Then advancing towards the table, and casting his eyes upon the papers scattered over it—"Are you turned poet?" demanded he, smiling—"Are these manuscripts yours?"

"They are not, indeed; I never, though, to confess the truth, I have often tried, could hammer out a couplet in my life."

"Then whose are these verses?"

I laughed and said—"O never mind: they are not intended for your perusal; so bring me the letter you are writing to Parkton Castle, and I will insert in it a few lines."

He hesitated whether to follow my counsel, and looked so curious, that he increased my risibility; and I could not forbear adding—"You had better go, as they say to children, *while you are well;* for I have a little philippic here which it would not much gratify your vanity to see."

His urgency for an explanation now became almost irresistible; I evaded his inquiries, and withstood his supplications as long as I could, but at last, quite overpowered by their importunity, I confessed what he already, I doubt not, suspected, that Geraldine was the poet—and finally, put into his hands the stanzas of which he is the subject.

He seized them with an avidity, and read them with an eagerness, which, from Ferdinand, generally so calm and quiet, equally surprised and amused me. At the beginning, a smile played about his mouth, and he looked perfectly unembarrassed: but as he proceeded, a deep glow overspread his cheeks—and he concluded them with an air of thorough mortification.

O Julia!" cried he, putting them down, and seating himself next me, "how my heart reproaches me for having given occasion to such lines! She wished to love me! And have I been so cruelly my own enemy as to repel a wish I would now give worlds to realize! You look surprised," added he, putting his arm round me—"Ah, dear girl, is it then possible you can still be in doubt as to the nature of my sentiments? Is it possible you can really be ignorant that I love Miss Fauconberg?—Love her with the fondest and most devoted passion?"

The full sincerity of this declaration, so sudden, and so unexpected, bereft me, for

a few moments, of all power to answer him. Joy, approbation, mingled with an undefinable sensation of inquietude as to the future fate of his attachment, combated for pre-eminence in my mind. When able to speak, I pressed his hand, saying—

"You deserve every thing, my dear Ferdinand! May you be happy!"

"But tell me," resumed he, anxiously seeking to read my countenance—"tell me, dear Julia, have I destroyed my own prospects for ever? You know the heart of Geraldine; what are its present feelings towards me?"

"Perhaps," said I, "she scarcely knows herself. Though she had talked of you much before you came, soon after, she entirely ceased to mention you. Madame de St. Hermine and I, though almost equally your friends, avoid leading officiously to the subject, and therefore both remain in doubt as to the actual state of her mind. Yet, we may reasonably flatter ourselves she *thinks* of you sometimes, or she never could have written those verses."

"Do not mention them, Julia! They fill me with shame and sorrow!" Then gazing around him as he sat—"Every object in this room," he added, "speaks eloquently of its lovely mistress. Here, in unobtrusive retirement, she cultivates those talents, which, superior as they are, she displays only for the gratification of others, never for the indulgence of her own vanity. Here, as I have often passed the door, without daring to enter, I have heard her sometimes singing, at others reading to you aloud; and the accents of that sweet voice, dearer to me every day, have riveted me to the spot, till I have incurred the danger of being surprised. Here—shall I confess it to you, Julia? I have come, when you have all been wandering in the park, and, undisturbed, indulged myself in the contemplation of the several objects that have employed her morning hours: the picture she has been painting, the book she has been reading, the very music, which, still open upon the desk, I concluded she had been practising. I have spent many delicious

moments in these stolen scrutinies; read every favourite passage she has marked; followed, from day to day, the progress of her pursuits—and felt happy whilst breathing the same air she had breathed—looking at the same elegant production she had been surveying."

"You are, indeed, a lover, my dear Ferdinand!—even a romantic one! Be of good courage, however: remember our Shakespeare's maxim—

> She's beautiful, and therefore to be woo'd;
> She is a woman, and therefore to be won!

"Persevere in little quiet assiduities; let not her indifference tempt you to show any impatience or ill-humour—and, above all, make haste out of this room, for, with these papers strewed about, I would not have her find you here for the world!"

He followed the counsel; hastily kissed me; called me "a dear consoling girl," and withdrew. I immediately collected, and locked up the poetry; and putting on my walking things, went out in search of the two ladies, whom I soon traced and joined.

Now tell me, Augusta, tell me, Caroline,

did I not treat this brother of ours with amazing lenity and mercy? Not a shadow of reproach, not a single allusion to the past—but mild and soft as a dove, I seemed to whisper peace and hope to his anxious heart! Perhaps the recollection, still so fresh in my mind, of his admirable conduct to the farmer's pretty daughter, might, even unknown to myself, influence my behaviour to him. At all events, I am glad I happened to receive his communication so prettily; I might not have done so in every humour; for you well know, that since his residence here, I have often, and with just reason, been extremely angry with him.

I am determined not to give a hint to Geraldine of what has passed between us. Ferdinand is too good to be made love for by proxy; he shall win her himself: and, at times, I am sanguine in my hopes of his success; at other moments, the idea of Lord Litchmere comes across me, and I sicken with doubt and alarm. Have I ever told you, that before he went from Westhill with his sisters, he announced his intention of hiring, as a hunting box, a small place in

this neighbourhood, called Rushley, whither he means, almost immediately, to establish himself for some months? Now, I cannot help surmising that this is done merely to be in the vicinity of Miss Fauconberg: Mr. Neville professes the utmost surprise at it, calls it a complete whim; and says he would not formerly have cared, had all the foxes in England had a price set upon their heads. Is not this calculated to strengthen my apprehensions? And if a man of such high character, a man of noble birth, large fortune, of unexceptionable manners, and apparently amiable disposition, starts up the competitor of our poor Ferdinand, what is his chance in the contest? He, who has to obliterate from her mind the most unfavourable recollections? he, who, with whatever reluctance, is compelled to abandon the field to his rival? to absent himself at a juncture the most critical, to leave his fate undecided, and his image scarcely cleared from the stain with which he sullied it by his own perverseness?

You will ask me, perhaps, what I mean by his being compelled to retreat? Can you

then think he intends to continue here an unaccepted, even an unacknowledged lover, without fresh encouragement from Mr. Archer; without any ostensible motive for remaining? No, certainly. He originally came (and with persuasion enough, Heaven knows!) for a month: on occasion of the ball, Mr. Archer pressed him to prolong the visit: but now, he seems to think it has been of reasonable duration, and makes no further effort to extend its continuance. Ferdinand, therefore, in conscience, in decency, can maintain his quarters no longer—and in a few days he leaves us; first, to pay a short visit to his former tutor, Mr. Newenden; and then, to join my mother at Parkton-Castle, where he soon expects visitors himself. Adieu, my dear sisters.

Yours, most affectionately,

JULIA LESMORE.

END OF THE FIRST VOLUME.

Printed by S. Hamilton, Weybridge, Surry.